

The Morning After by Office

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Summary:

Turmoil is a normal word in Billy Hargrove's life. Things only get worse when his father moves him and his new family to Hawkins, IN. Meanwhile, ex-king Steve Harrington, battles with the trauma of having to deal with the Upside Down and the recent break up from his girlfriend. Pain and dysfunction are becoming the norm in the boy's lives. Could the light at the end of the tunnel be consoling in each other?

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Trying my best to keep this 80s style, but alas some references and objects may have time traveled.
shrugs Hope you enjoy the story anyway.

Winter

Things had gotten worse. Billy took a long shaky drag from his cigarette. Ever since his father lost his job and their house started having electrically issues, it was like every day was a battle. He wouldn't lay a hand on Max or Susan, though sometimes on Billy's darkest days he wished he could tag team out. Instead, Billy was the punching bag, the go to when Neil needed someone to blame. Billy sat in his car and let his cigarette rest in his hands. He didn't care about this town and would leave tonight if he had any place to go. His father was a poison on everything he touched and because of that Billy had no contact with his aunts or uncles. His mother was long dead and Billy thought after his father met Susan he would back off, that he would lighten up. Billy sat and stared out the window with his teeth clenched tight, fighting the warmth building up in his eyes. Instead, all they created was a direct tunnel of aggression right towards Billy.

"That stupid bitch," Billy muttered under his breath in the cold of the night. He didn't fight the warmth this time. His eyes watered and tears escaped from his eyes, burning the cut he had on his cheek. He raised his hand quickly to wipe them away, it hurt, but he ignored the pain and took another hit from his cigarette.

After twenty minutes or so Billy was content on sleeping out here. He had no desire to return home tonight and this place in the woods was quiet and peaceful. He re-adjusted himself in the front seat and was seriously considering the idea when he saw something move in the bushes through his rearview mirror. He squinted as the movement increased and rested his arms on his steering wheel and watched the

bushes, lit only by the moonlight. From them appeared the familiar face of Steve Harrington.

Steve woke up in a fit of sweat for another night this week. Things had not been good since his break up with Nancy and the night terrors were robbing him of any energy he had left. His entire life had been turned upside down in the course of a few months with the return of the demogorgons. He thought he was past this, he thought it was a one-time only thing. That's what he told himself at night at least, but in reality the monsters from the upside down scared him more than anything. Steve sat up in bed and rested his head on his knee. How many nights would this have to go on? He felt like he was suffering alone in silence with no one to talk to. Like the kids, he had sworn to secrecy, again, but unlike last time he had Nancy to talk to. Now that Nancy was gone, he felt even more isolated. Steve leaned up and looked outside. In the past when things got bad, he'd take a walk. He peered up at the starry sky, it was perfectly clear. He slipped out of bed and threw up some jeans, a shirt, and a coat. He snuck past his parent's room and left out the backdoor.

There was a spot he use to go to when he felt angry or sad. It was a long walk, about forty minutes or so, but he didn't care. It wasn't like he was getting any sleep tonight anyways. He pulled his coat together as he shivered and looked up at the big silvery moon, it was gorgeous. He smiled a little and set off into the night.

He did not mind the bitter cold. His face and ears were burning and his body trembled with every step. He took short hollow breaths as he climbed up familiar paths, wishing these roads would take him back in time to a place where he could be in Nancy's arms.

"You're so fucking stupid." He stopped midway over a rock and looked down at the Earth. He wished it was him that had gotten eaten by a demogorgon, it seemed more humane he thought. He looked up at the sky again. How many more restless nights? He would be graduating soon and what would he be doing then?

Working for his dad? He laughed, now he really wished he had died back there. He continued his ascent; he was almost to his spot. He just needed to clear the bushes and walk a few feet through the clearing, and past the low laying bushes would be his spot. The brush was thick up ahead and it took him sometime to clear it. He fought with a few stubborn branches and emerged out of the brushes only to find a blue Camaro that looked strikingly similar to the one driven by Billy Hargrove.

Billy caught Steve looking at him and squeezed tightly on the leather of his steering wheel. He couldn't even get any privacy out here. Steve paused for a moment, then started walking towards Billy's car. Billy clenched his jaw, but didn't make a move or a sound as Steve ignored him and walked right by.

"Where the fuck?" Billy squinted as he watched Steve walk through the bushes up ahead. Billy pulled the keys out from the ignition and opened the door and took a step out. He had an itch to light a cigarette and reached into his pocket to light one as he watched the spot Steve disappeared into.

Steve breathed a sigh of relief when he didn't hear the sound of Billy's door close. He was in no mood to deal with Billy's bullshit. He swore Billy had it out for him. Billy teased and messed with him a lot in school and no matter how many fights they got into, Steve couldn't shake him. It was like Billy had honed into him and selected Steve to be his new target. Steve guessed he should feel lucky that it was him instead of Max, but it didn't help when he was already frustrated with so many other things on his mind.

Steve heard the sound of a door close and he stopped. He watched as a cloud of warm air escaped from his mouth. If he ran now he could bypass Billy all together, he knew these woods pretty good. But Steve was too tired. This was supposed to be a relaxing walk, but it seemed

there was no place for him to feel safe and relax. Steve opened his eyes when he heard footsteps behind him. They stopped and now Billy was standing only a few feet behind him. Steve clenched his jaw and swallowed down his anger as the smell of cigarette smoke filled the air.

“Harrington,” Billy took another long drag from his cigarette. It was chilly outside and he didn’t bring a jacket when he left his house.

“Yeah,” Steve finally turned around. It was dark, but Billy could clearly see that Steve was mad. Billy smirked as he rolled the cigarette smoke out of his mouth. “What are you doing out here Billy?”

“I could ask you the same thing.” Billy kicked the ash off his bud. He winced every time he blinked as the cold air chapped his cut.

Steve stood there and contemplated taking off and leaving, but he could go another round. “You’re a long way from home Billy, you lost? I could point you in right direction to your mommy and daddy’s place, it’s just down the road.” Steve said with an extra hint of cockiness.

Billy clenched his jaw and threw down his cigarette and killed it with his foot. “You really asking for it tonight Harrington.” Billy growled into laugh.

“Maybe I am, maybe I’m not, but I’m not the one sulking in the woods.” Steve cracked a cocky grin. That hit a nerve and Steve could see the rage building below the surface ready to explode. “Or should I tell Max her big brother is sneaking off into the night?”

That was it. That was the last levee Billy had and he charged Steve like a bull in rage. Steve matched Billy’s rage and swung at Billy with all he had. The boy’s fist collided with each other’s faces and both stumbled to the ground. The searing pain of Steve’s hit on the very

spot where Billy's cut was made he nearly black out. Billy fell into the leaves but the adrenaline had him crawling to his feet. Steve struggled to recover from Billy's blow. It had been a long time since Billy had hit him that hard and his mind had seemed to have forgotten just how strong Billy was. Steve winced, but wobbled to his feet. This time the two boys locked hands in a struggle to knock one another over. That's when Steve noticed Billy's face. His left cheek was covered in blood.

"Shit dude." Steve broke the hold, but that didn't stop Billy from tackling him to the ground and pounding him in his face. Steve threw his hands up to block. "Fuck off!" Steve shouted.

"You want me to stop now!" Billy continued to hit Steve's arms. "What about all that talk about calling my bitch of a sister? She ain't here to save your ass now." Billy grabbed Steve's arm and tried to pry it from his face.

"Shit Billy!" Steve used his free hand to clock Billy in his bad eye. That stopped him but only for a few seconds. Billy tumbled in the leaves and Steve's knuckles were smeared with blood. "Dude you need to stop." But that only seemed to make Billy madder. Billy charged him. "Stop! Your fucking face is bleeding! Serious!" Steve wrestled Billy off of him.

"What do you care?" Billy had a hard grip on Steve's arm.

"I don't, but you should, because it's fucking bleeding like crazy." Steve looked at Billy and Billy looked into Steve's eyes. Billy thought he saw a hint of compassion, but that only made him angrier. He lifted his fist to punch Steve again, but Steve flinched.

Billy paused mid punch and chuckled as he threw Steve to the ground. "Bitch." Billy got up and felt a little dizzy. His head was really hurting now and it was starting to bloom into a full on headache.

"You need help Billy." Steve got up and nursed his wounds. His nose was bleeding.

"Fuck off." Billy wobbled to his car. His head was now pounding, he

just wanted to get back to his car and rest, but his body was didn't have the stamina.

Steve watched Billy stumbled away and cursed under his breath. Steve was hurting, but he didn't make this trip for nothing. He was just about to enter the clearing, when he heard Billy stumbled to the ground. Steve stopped and listened for the sound of footsteps and after a few seconds of silence Steve turned around and looked for a shadow or any sign of movement.

"Damnit Billy." Steve ran over to the spot he thought he heard Billy fall. He nearly passed him when he heard the sound of rustling leaves. "Billy?" There was nothing, but in the moonlight Steve could make out the figure of Billy leaning against a tree. "Hey, you okay." Billy only trailed off into laughter. Steve squatted down and rolled his eyes. "Are you okay?" He asked again.

"Piss off Harrington." Billy said as he dosed in and out.

"Screw this." Steve stood up and reached down to pull Billy to his feet. Billy grunted in protest as Steve lifted Billy's arm over his shoulder. "I'm taking you home." Billy winced and stumbled into Steve's arms with Steve practically holding him up.

"Let go." Billy struggled, but his body was screaming after his adrenaline started to fade. His head and ribs hurt and he was started to feel cold. He groaned as his legs started to fail.

"Really," Steve complained as he dragged Billy's half limb body to the passenger seat of his car. Steve fumbled with the door, and finally got it open. Steve helped Billy in, buckled him up, and closed the door. He still remembered where he lived from the times he took Max home and he was starting to feel a tinge of excitement from driving Billy's car. Steve hopped in and turned on the car. He looked at Billy. He looked like shit. Steve felt a little bad, he didn't think he hit him that hard. "Hey, um, you wanna head to the hospital or something?" Billy just shook his head. "Okay, well I'm taking you home now." Billy opened his eyes and reached over and grabbed the steering wheel. "What?" Steve looked at him in annoyance.

"No," Billy slowly panted as he looked out the window.

Steve sat there mouth open and irritated. "Okay, so where do you want to go?"

"It doesn't matter." Billy managed to get out, before closing his eyes.

"Home it is." Steve put it in drive and backed out of the clearing.

Billy opened his eyes and watched the stars through the tree line. It looked so beautiful and peaceful at night, it made him want to sleep and never wake up. "Why were you out in the woods alone?" Billy said the break the silence, it wasn't that he cared, he was just biding his time.

It was a long while before Steve said anything. He stopped at a stop sign then pulled off. "I needed some air."

Billy cracked a smile. "What? Things getting hard for the pretty boy?"

Steve actually stared at him this time. "You really think you got me all figured out?"

Billy looked over at Steve who was staring between him and the road. "Let me guess, you got your heart broke?" Billy saw Steve's eyebrow twitch, then he laughed a little. "You'll get over it."

"You really are a piece of shit."

"Yeah," Billy said in a tone of voice, familiar to Steve. It was so hollow and dejected. It was like he actually believed it.

"Well, it's not just that. Life has been super shit lately and I don't care if you think my life is all peaches and cream, because it's not." Steve turned onto Billy's street and pulled into his driveway.

"Well join the fucking party." Billy looked into Steve's eyes. He saw a little bit of himself and it hurt even more to see his own eyes staring back at him. The two sat that in silence and said nothing. Steve lived a lot farther away from Billy and should have thought about that before driving Billy home. "If you need to crash, be out by nine. I don't want to hear your shit. I don't need no cops coming after me if they find you a frozen Popsicle on the side of the road." Billy opened

the door and rolled out of the car and shut the door.

Steve watched Billy stumble to his front door. He turned and looked out the front window. What was that immense sadness in Billy's eyes? What was he fighting? Whatever it was, Steve felt drawn to it, like a cold creature searching for warmth. Steve got out of the car and closed the door. He ran up the porch and Billy turned around sharply to hush him.

"Can it, blanket is on the couch." Billy opened the door and turned around. "In the morning you walk home or catch a ride with Max's shit hole friends I don't care, just don't bother me. That clear?"

"Yeah." Steve shrugged. He followed Billy in and watched him disappear upstairs. His house was warm and cozy, he couldn't fathom why Billy would leave such a place, but it did feel nice to sleep in someone else's home, even if it was the home of Billy Hargrove.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

The second part is here!!!
Enjoy.

Snow Day

The power flickered, then fizzled out in the kitchen just as Susan was in the middle of cooking breakfast for her family. She looked around and noticed that none of her appliances were on, even the radio was off. She stepped away from the stove and flicked the light switch on the wall on and off and took a deep breath. There was a big snow storm last night and she hoped that's what knocked out their power. Neil shouted from upstairs and loud footsteps could be heard from the floor above.

"Susan what in the?" Neil flipped the switch in the kitchen. "Is the power out?"

"Don't worry about it honey." Susan walked over to her husband and tried to dampen his temper with a kiss. She buttoned his dress shirt and fixed him a plate of what little she managed to prepare.

"I swear this house is a piece of shit." Neil sat down at the table and looked down at his plate. "Is this all?"

Susan frowned. "The power went out."

"On the stove too?" Neil picked at his kid sized portion with displeasure.

Susan didn't honor that with a response, it would only lead to another argument and she didn't want the kids to hear. "I talked with our new neighbors, the Cornfields, Marsha says her husband's place has a manager position open and they want to fill it fast. I wrote down the address."

Neil's expression softened. These days he was having trouble staying in control, with the loss of his job, but he had Susan and he was grateful for that. "Thank you Susan."

She walked over to him and kissed him on the forehead as she slid another egg on his plate. "We're going to be okay." Neil placed his hand on top of hers.

The power didn't come back on all day and it would seem that the Hargrove's house was the only one affected. Susan was lucky the phone line still worked, but that meant she would miss another day at work trying to figure out why the wiring in their house didn't work. Upstairs she heard a rustle, Billy and Max must be up and from the sound of it, it seems like they found out the power was out too.

Max was the first to run down the stairs shivering. "Mom, why's it so cold in here?"

"The power is out sweetie." Susan replied.

Billy came walking down the stairs next, giving Susan a sharp glare as he started to light his cigarette.

"Billy can you not smoke in the house." Susan did not like the way it stunk up the house and wished he would quit. Billy stopped mid light and eyed her coldly, clenching his jaw as he put his lighter away.

"Here," Susan stood and walked over to her wallet. "Why don't you two head out for the day. It's the weekend and it's snowing. You don't get to experience that where we're from." She pulled out two ten dollar bills.

Billy walked over and looked at the money. "Should you be giving out money with Neil out of work?"

Susan pursed her lips, Billy had his father's mouth and temper, she took a deep breath and shoved the money towards her kids. "Well the

power's out, so if you want to eat spoiled food and freeze to death go right ahead, but I'd rather you two go out and enjoy your snow day."

Max nodded. "Thanks mom."

"Whatever." Billy turned on his heels, but tucked the money into his tight denim blue jeans.

"Hey, can you take me to the park?" Max asked.

"No." Billy headed back upstairs to his room.

"So you're just going to stay here all day?"

"Maybe." Billy continued to his room, but Max followed.

"Really." Max stood in the frame of his door, annoyed.

"You have a bike." Billy searched around his room for a pair of socks.

"In the snow?"

"I can't drive in this shit." He waved towards the windows.

"The roads are clear." Max commented in frustration. "Why do you have to be so difficult?"

Billy took a step towards her, but Max held her ground. "Why do you have to be such a little bitch, what the fuck is wrong with your legs?"

"Screw you Billy." Max shook her long red hair and disappeared down the hall.

Billy walked over to the window. The roads were pretty clear and he was getting hungry. He could run down the street to the local spot and grab a bite and perhaps pick up a few girls.

"Billy! Take you sister to the park!" Billy heard Susan shout from downstairs, whatever hope he had for the day disappeared. Refusal meant Susan would tell Neil and that was not how Billy wanted to end his day.

He lit himself a cigarette and took a short hit. "We leave in ten

minutes!” He shouted from his room.

Steve was dressed and ready to start his day. It was a snow day and he was sure everyone would be at the spot chilling. His dad was home shouting over the phone at his associates as usual and his mom was at work. He tried to sneak past his dad, but he saw him out of the corner of his eye.

“Hold on, hey piss for brains, your greasy little friend is at the door, didn’t you hear me calling you? No I’m not talking to you Clifford, for fucksakes.”

Steve stopped and rolled his eyes as he shook his head. He half expected it to be Nancy, but his gut told him it could only be one person. Steve opened the door.

“Hiya Steve.” Dustin smiled, which lit up his entire face.

Steve sighed. “What are you doing here Dustin?”

Dustin shrugged. “Can I get a ride?”

“What? To where?”

“The park.” Dustin said nonchalantly.

“Don’t you live closer to the park than I do, how’d you get here?” Steve looked around his yard.

“I road my bike.”

Steve stared at him with a deadpan look. “Then, why didn’t you just use that to get to the park?”

Dustin forced a smile. “Okay,” He slumped over. “I just wanted to hang out.”

Steve stared at him like an annoyed mother. He looked over his shoulders and saw his dad pacing around the den. His dad saw him and shooed him away. "Okay."

"Really?" Dustin perked up.

"Yeah." Steve grabbed his coat and walked out the door.

In the car Dustin watched the trees go by. "So, how's life?"

"Good." Steve drove down the main street.

"How's school?"

"Good." Steve replied again with the same lack of enthusiasm.

"How's-"

"Okay, Dustin." Steve stopped him. "If we're going to hang and I really shouldn't be hanging with a kid, but you're cool, but if we're going to hang we hang in silence." Dustin frowned and Steve looked over and sighed. "That's what dudes do, that hang, in silence. You know, with the tunes blasting. It's cooler than way."

Dustin shrugged. "Sounds kind of lame."

"Well that's how I hang." Steve reached over and turned on the radio.

Steve dropped Dustin off at the park and asked him if he needed a ride home. He didn't and Steve felt a little hurt. He hoped he hadn't pushed Dustin away, but then he saw the whole gang waving at him. Dustin paused for a moment and turned around and waved back at Steve. Steve cracked a fake looking smile and waved back, but really he was happy to see that Dustin wasn't mad at him. Steve pulled off and headed to the spot, which was a small diner in a small strip small across the street from the park. It was packed, but he found a good place to park and hopped out. Steve smiled and pulled his jacket

together and not even two seconds out of his car did his face come into contact with a ball of snow. Steve jumped and wiped the snow from his face, which left a little red spot. He looked around and saw the grinning face of Billy Hargrove. That kid was an ass, but he had toned it down over the past few days. Steve flipped him the bird and walked over to the diner.

Tommy and his friends laughed as Billy busted a gut. He caught sight of a few high schools from another school who were practically undressing him with their eyes and winked. The girls melted and Billy walked away like he didn't even care.

Michael, one of the boys on the basketball team, watched Billy walk away. "Hey Tommy I don't like that new kid."

Tommy turned to Michael. "Why?"

"He's the new kid and he's been walking around here like he runs the place. I mean when Steve was on top, you were like number two and honestly I like you a lot better than that arrogant prick."

David nodded. "Yeah, he acts like he runs the place and what, he's been here for like a few months."

Tommy looked at his friends. "So what are we going to do about it?"

Michael rolled his eyes. "Are you going to let that blonde fuck bag walk into your kingdom and hit on your girls and do nothing about it?"

"I got a girl, I ain't worried." Tommy said smartly.

"Oh yeah," Michael pointed. "Ain't that your girl giving Billy the eyes?"

Tommy watched Carol flirt a little with Billy and that infuriated him. Carol was his girl and there was no way anybody was messing with his girl.

Billy burped and groaned. His stomach was in knots, he sat on a bench a ways away from the crowd. He had a bad habit of eating fast, but no one could tell his fingers that his food wasn't going anywhere. Billy laid back, content on napping his pains away, until he heard the sound of footsteps.

"Hey Billy." Tommy stood in front of him. Billy leaned up and opened one eye, the sun was blaring in his face.

"What?" Billy muffled a burp and leaned forward and saw Tommy and a few boys from the basketball team, Michael, David, John, and James.

"Saw you talking to my girl Carol." Tommy clenched his fist.

"So?" Billy could feel the sweats coming on. He was baking under the winter sun.

Tommy licked his limbs and shook his head as the anger built up under his skin. "That's my girl Billy."

"Look man, you can keep your cow I don't need her. I got a million girls on my sleeve." Billy waved him off.

Tommy wanted to charge him right then and there, but Michael stopped him. "Me and the boys don't like what you're doing to the place. You stink Hargrove." Michael stepped in front of Tommy.

Billy looked up and cleaned the film off his teeth with his tongue and stood up. "So what's this? A rebellion, because last time I checked I didn't sign up to be king, your bitches flocked to me naturally." Billy cracked a cocky grin.

"That's it Hargrove you're through." Tommy charged.

Billy easily dodged and pushed Tommy to the ground. His friends crowded around, but didn't step in. Tommy got up off the ground and took a few good swings, none of them landed, which made Billy laugh. Billy swung at Tommy, but Tommy blocked, but nearly stumbled over.

"I hope you can fight better than this." Billy jumped in place as he shook his hands.

Tommy charged Billy again, this time with a little more force. Billy only stumbled back a few inches but was able to hold his ground. Billy pushed back, clearly drawing the line as to who was stronger. Enraged Michael jumped in and uppercutted Billy in the stomach. Billy immediately broke his hold and dropped to his knees. He cradled his stomach, which gave Tommy plenty of time for a comeback. Tommy clocked Billy in the face, which knocked him on his butt. The other boys jumped in and soon it turned into a stomping. Billy guarded best he could, but five on one was not a fair match. The boys beat him relentlessly and backed off only when they saw Billy panting helplessly on the ground.

Michael kicked him hard in the gut for good measure. "I hope you learned your lesson Hargrove." The boys walked away.

Billy coughed and groaned as his body started the wail. He managed to crawl back over to the bench before evacuating his lunch into the grass next to the light pole. Now he really did feel like he was dying. He rubbed his bruised hands across his sweaty forehead and open mouth breathed as his stomach turned.

"We have to stop meeting like this." A shadow stood over Billy.

Billy looked up and saw Steve Harrington standing over him. Billy faked his best shit-eating grin. "Harrington."

"Hargrove," Steve returned Billy's formal greeting. "And once again I find you alone somewhere with the shit beaten out of you and this time it wasn't me."

Billy genuinely laughed, but belched a little vomit onto the pavement as he did.

"That's disgusting." Steve winced. "Do I need to take you home, again?"

"Piss off." But there was little bit to his treat. Billy instead leaned against the pole, ready to fall asleep.

Steve rolled his eyes. "I guess it's the hard way then, again." Steve reached down and pulled Billy to his feet. This was starting to become a normal thing. "And if you vomit in my car, I swear I'll beat your ass." Billy only grinned as he stumbled to Steve's car. Once in Steve took a better look at Billy, he looked like shit, even worse than the first time he took him home. Before starting his car Steve stopped and stared at Billy for a few seconds. "Your folks home?" Billy shrugged. Steve sighed. He couldn't leave him home alone, not in his condition, but being his little baby sitter was becoming an annoyance. "My place it is."

Steve hoped to God that his dad wasn't home, but it was just his luck that his dad's car was sitting parked in the driveway still covered in the snow. Steve killed the engine and opened the door, got out, and slammed it, waking up Billy instantly. Billy blinked several times, staring at Steve's big house. Steve opened the door.

"Okay, we're here." When Billy didn't move Steve pulled him out.

"Nice place." Billy muttered, but Steve knew he was being sarcastic.

"You want me to drop you?" Steve warned as they walked up to the door. Steve unlocked it and heard the sound of his dad yelling at someone over the phone. "Fuck," Steve muttered under his breath and tried to sneak past his dad.

"Yeah and if those reports aren't on my desk by tomorrow I'll be serving your ass on a platter Jacobson." Steve's dad turned around. "Wo wo, what the fuck is this?" He took one look at Billy. "Who the fuck is that?"

"Dad, he's one of my friends from the basketball team."

"Why's he hanging on you like that? What the fuck are you up to?"

"Nothing." Steve rolled eyes and tried to hurry away.

“No, hell no, you’re not dragging some half unconscious boy to your room to fuck or something.”

“Dad!” Steve shouted.

“Hey! I don’t know this kid, why you bringing these people up in my house?” Steve could see the veins popping on his father’s head.

“It’s fine.” Billy coughed dramatically. “I could just lay outside and die or something.” He faked a groan. “I feel like my appendix is going to burst, but I’m sure the snow will keep me warm.” Billy flashed a fake sad grin.

Steve’s dad looked between Steve and Billy with real concern. “Wait, wait, wait, is he for real? No kid is dying on my lawn. I’m calling your mother.” Steve’s dad started dialing his phone and with the receiver on his ear shouted to Steve. “And take him to the guest room! Don’t need your mom coming in to see some boy sleeping in your bed.”

Steve rolled his eyes in embarrassment. He hated his dad and it was the main reason why he didn’t bring company over. Steve managed to get Billy to the guest room and plopped him on the bed. Steve turned around and saw Billy on his back with his eyes shut tight and his legs hanging over the bed.

“You going to be alright?” Steve asked with real concern in his voice.

“Relax mom, I only have a stomach ache, I ain’t dying.” Billy forced a smiled over the pain that clearly showed on his face.

“Whatever, sorry I asked.” Steve waved his hands in the air and walked over to the other side of the bed to close the blinds. “Take off your shoes.” Billy kicked them off with little care where they landed and crawled completely onto bed. Billy felt like shit, but it was just his stomach now. That little beating he got was nothing compared to the fights he had been through throughout his life. Steve hovered over Billy to make sure he was okay, before leaving.

“This bed is so fucking comfortable, must be nice to live life set like this.” Billy said with his eyes closed, lying on his stomach.

Steve snorted. "Yeah, well this place isn't all paradise." Steve headed for the door.

"You ain't the only one with a piss ball prick of a dad." Billy muttered under his breath before falling asleep.

Steve stopped in the frame. He turned around, but Billy was sound asleep. He watched his resting figure for a second as he processed his words. Steve clenched his jaws as he squeezed the door knob. He guessed they had more in common than he thought. Steve closed the door.

A few hours later Steve's mom returned home. Steve could tell by the tone of voice his father used when speaking to her. He yelled and she sassied back, they were actually perfect for each other. If only Steve had inherited her patience. There was a light knock on his door and his mom opened the door.

"Alright sugar pea, I'm going to peep in on your friend, but first let me get out of this." She pointed to her soiled scrubs. Steve nodded and got up from the bed. He thought he would check up on Billy first to make sure he was okay. He meant to check up on him sooner, but he had actually fallen asleep, one of the draw backs of his restless nights.

He headed down to the guest room and knocked on the door and listened. "Billy? You up?" When he didn't hear anything he slowly opened the door. He looked in on the sleeping figure half covered with sheets and a bed spread sleeping soundly. Steve opened the door all the way and sneaked in, careful not to make a sound. He stared down at the floor and saw Billy's jeans hanging off the bed. On the other side he saw Billy's shirt and jacket. Steve felt a little uncomfortable at first, not wanting to search any further in case he saw more clothes than he needed to see.

"Billy?" He near whispered. Billy was knocked out, his face looked a

little red as one of his arms laid wrapped around the pillow and the other laying by his side. Steve stopped and listened out for his mom, he could hear her walking around, but could tell she was still in her room. Steve walked over to Billy and stood over him. He barely looked like he was in a fight, aside from a few scraps and bruises. He did however not look well, he looked warm. Steve was hesitant at first, but reached down to see if he had a fever. He pressed the back of his hand against Billy's forehead. It was warm, but not moist. Steve, using extreme caution, moved his hands under Billy's chin to feel under his neck. It was weird, but Billy's skin felt nice under his hands. His skin was not as pale as he thought it would be and it was clear and smooth but firm from muscle.

"I'll take it from here sugar pea." Steve's mom smirked as she watched her son try and play nurse. Steve jumped up as if his spirit was trying to expel itself from his body. "He feel warm?" She checked Billy's forehead. Steve shrugged and stepped away from the bed. His mom checked under his neck. "Not bad, what did you say was wrong with him?"

"Um," Steve scratched his head, trying to play it cool knowing his mom had just seen him feeling all over the school bully. "He said his stomach was hurting or something."

"He ate down at that place didn't he?" Steve's mom shook her head. "I told you that owner is neglectful, I swear I get kids every year getting sick off that place. You get sick, I'm telling your father, he'll set them straight." She placed her hands on Billy's back. "You sure he's not a football player, he's got a few scraps and bruises?"

"I-ah, I don't know, mom can you hurry up?"

She chuckled. "Fine, alright sugar wake up." She lightly shook Billy awake. He squirmed a little and turned his head away from Steve's mom and opened his eyes. He turned back around when he sensed another person and sat up a little as the covers slipped off his back. "You okay hun? I'm Steve's mom, Mrs. Harrington." Billy nodded with a sleepy look on his face. He turned and looked at Steve, then scratched his head. "Your tummy still bothering you?" She asked in the softest voice.

Billy smiled. "No ma'am."

"Oh okay, good. Well if you want to stay over for dinner that's fine. It's dark out I'll give you a ride home."

"Mom it's okay I can take him home, his car is still at the place."

Steve's mom shook her head. "Steve it's dark and icy out there, today's Saturday. Yawl can pick up his car tomorrow, unless you want to stay the night sugar?"

Billy looked at Steve's mom. He cracked a little smile to hide his vulnerability. She reminded him so much of his mother, it hurt. "Uh, I don't want to be a bother Mrs. Harrington."

"It's no bother." She stood and headed for the door. "I'll phone your parents and in the morning Steve can take you to your car. I'm making a box meal, Steve bring me your friend's telephone number. Oh and sweetie I didn't catch your name." She turned to Billy.

Billy looked up. "It's um, it's Billy, Billy Hargrove."

She smiled. "Okay Billy, well I hope you like hamburger helper."

Steve saw a flicker in Billy's eyes, it was brief, but it showed how delicate and frail Billy really was, a small peek inside the armored shell around Billy's heart.

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm trying to keep'em rolling!
=)

Fire

A low hum stirred Susan Hargrove from her sleep. She opened her eyes and rolled over to see the flashing numbers on her digital clock. She squinted at the twelve o'clock time bleeping on and off.

"The power is back on." She yawned and turned over in bed. "The power is back on!" She flung the covers off of herself and jumped out of bed, waking her sleeping husband.

Neil groaned as the sting of cold air nipped at his back. He grunted and pulled the covers over himself, but it was no use. Susan's excitement had pushed away any hope he had of falling back to sleep. He got up and sat deflated on the edge of the bed.

"The power's back on!" Susan came running into the bedroom. The popping and crackling sound of the furnace sent waves of excitement across Susan's face.

"Okay." Neil said dejectedly.

Susan frowned, but sighed. "Well, that's one thing we can cross off our list." She walked around the bed to the closet.

Neil followed her movements, hoping she would come back to bed with him. "What are you doing?" He looked at the clock, the time was wrong and that annoyed him.

"I'm going to the store." Susan grabbed a handful of clothes and headed to the shower.

"Right now?" Neil said with a heightened tone of annoyance in his

voice.

“Yes now.”

“What time is it?” The heat was on, but it was still brick cold in their house.

Susan popped back into the bedroom and looked at her wrist watch. “Nine thirty.”

“Nine thirty, Susan it’s Sunday morning, is the grocery store even open?”

Susan ignored his tone, but answered his question. “Yes it is, they opened at eight this morning. Neil we have no food in the house and I’ve been dying to cook a proper meal. The electrician said everything should be fixed now and I want to cook. Now go back to bed. Tell the kids to be home by five o’clock sharp. I’m making my special.” She disappeared into the bathroom and closed the door. Neil grunted and tried to go back to sleep.

The power was back on, but there wasn’t a speck of food in the house when Neil came downstairs some hours later. He had his house coat on as he made his way to the kitchen.

“Son of a bitch.” Neil shouted from the kitchen. Billy was in the den, finishing off a box of crackers. “Where are the crackers? Damnit.” Billy ate the last one and hid the box. He didn’t need to deal with dad rage this early in the morning. He had plans today. “Billy is that you in there?”

“Yeah.” Billy finally said after a few seconds.

“Your sister here?”

“I don’t know.”

Neil walked into the den. “Then get your lazy ass up and check.”

Billy glared at his father, but he knew that it was better to fold when his dad was in a bad mood. Billy rolled himself off the couch and walked upstairs. Max wasn't in her room, but he saw the light on in the bathroom. The door was cracked and he pushed it wide open without a care in the world.

“What the fuck Billy!” Max covered her chest.

Billy stared at her. “What the fuck are you covering up?”

“What the fuck do you want?!” Her face reddened as she snapped back.

Billy shrugged. “Neil wanted to know if you're here.”

Max stared with her mouth open and clenched her jaw and rolled her eyes. “Well I'm here, can you get the fuck out now?”

Billy shook his head and left without closing the door. Max hurried and slammed the door.

“Hey! Don't be slamming those doors up there!” Neil shouted from downstairs.

Billy ignored him and headed to his room. He grabbed his jacket and wallet and fluffed his hair in the mirror. He smiled, then left to head downstairs.

“Hey, where' your sister?” Neil stopped Billy just as he was about to leave.

“Upstairs.” Billy rolled his eyes.

“Did you tell her I needed to talk to her?”

“What? No.” Billy turned and looked at his dad with an annoyed look on his face.

“Never mind, I swear you're getting dumber by the day.” Neil turned, but stopped as Billy was just about to storm off. “Also, Susan's

cooking dinner tonight at five pm sharp. Don't be late Billy." Billy turned around about to tell his dad off, but the look in his father's eyes actually scared him a little. "Is that understood?"

"Yes sir." Billy hated saying that, but he hated being beaten by his father even more. Neil was relentless in his attacks against Billy if he stepped out of line. Billy turned and left his house. He was almost not in the mood to execute his plan today, but then he realized how therapeutic it would be to pound someone else into ash. He flashed a cocky grin as he walked to his Camaro.

Waking up early from a restless night of sleep was not the way Steve wanted to start his day. But what choice did he have, given the current state of his mind. Last night, however, he did manage to get a solid three hours of sleep. That was a plus for him, not to mention his mom left a jar of eye cream for him to use in his bathroom. He wanted so badly to tell her about the events that happened to him last year and a few months ago, but it was too risky and he wasn't sure if the government was still watching him. Steve washed his face and moisturized. Even though he couldn't talk to her directly he swore she had a sixth sense for his suffering. Every once in a while a solution would appear for a problem he didn't even know he had. Today's gift was rejuvenating eye cream.

"Thank you mom." Steve twisted open the jar, he was going to look like a million bucks today, even though he was still tired as crap.

It was Sunday and Steve's father was knocked out sleep, another score for Steve. His mother was at work, but she baked cinnamon buns for him, which lifted his mood considerably. So when he opened his door and saw Billy grinning on the side of his blue Camaro he was ready for whatever reason Billy had for being at his house.

"Morning sunshine, sleep well?" Billy looked so smug in his blue denim jacket and way too tight blue jeans.

“Billy what are you doing here?”

“Come on Harrington, I thought we were pals? We’ve been playing sleep over for the past few weeks, doesn’t that make us two peas in a pod?” Billy walked over to Steve and cracked a shady grin.

Steve studied his eyes, Billy wanted something, but somehow Steve wasn’t bothered by entertaining what he had to say. “Okay.” Steve closed his front door.

“Good, because we have a date.” Billy turned and headed to his car.

Steve near choked when he heard that word. “What?”

Billy stopped and looked at Steve. “With your pals on the basketball team, the good’ole boys decided to treat me to a good old fashion ass beating the other day. I thought I’d return the favor.” The hungry look in Billy’s eyes kind of scared Steve.

“So you want us to beat up Tommy and his friends?” Steve started to walk towards Billy’s car.

“What? The king giving up so soon?” Billy opened the driver seat door.

“I don’t care about that stuff anymore.” Steve got in, he wasn’t sure why he was tagging along for this, but he told himself he had nothing better to do.

Billy shrugged. “Suit yourself.” Billy pulled out of Steve’s driveway and blasted AC/DC in his car.

Steve knew where Tommy lived and now he kind of regretted telling Billy after seeing how excited he was to kick his ass. This couldn’t end well, for Tommy that is, but in all fairness Tommy had been a real ass over the past few months. Steve couldn’t help but acknowledge Billy had a lot to do with this as well, but at the end of

the day Tommy had to make a choice and given his track record he always choose wrong. Billy whipped into Tommy's yard, kicking up dirt and rocks as he stopped. Billy jumped out as Tommy squinted to see who it was pulling into his driveway.

"Tommy!" Billy got out of his car and slammed the door. Steve got out but only stood behind the door and leaned on it.

Tommy looked at Steve, then back at Billy. "What are you doing here Hargrove?" He said with less confidence than he had before.

Billy stopped and looked at him with a surprised look on his face. "What? You don't know?" Billy smiled and licked his lips as he shook his head. "You and your pals decided to jump me last week. Now I'm not one to roll in packs, princess here, is just here to watch. I like to handle my business one on one, like a man."

Tommy took a step back, but not any further. "You here for round two? You talk tough, but last week you were eating concrete."

Billy's grin didn't crack. "It took five of you just to take me down, now I'm no mathematician, but does that sound like a fair fight to you?" Billy held up his finger. "Don't answer that, it doesn't matter, because Billy here makes house calls and you better make this fun for me."

It wasn't really a fight and Steve was sure Tommy pissed his pants a little. Billy's knuckles were red only because he had pretty much pounded Tommy into the dirt. Steve had to pull him off. Billy drummed his fingers on his steering wheel as they speed down the road to Michael's house. Steve asked if they were going to visit each house, but Billy said he only needed to knock out the big two and the rest wouldn't dare step to him. And Steve had to agree, you would have to be mad to step to Billy after seeing how much fun he had just wailing on people. Michael wasn't home and Steve thought he could breathe a sigh of relieve for his ex-friend, when he saw Billy talking to his sister. She melted under Billy's expert gaze. The two talked and Steve thought he saw a number being exchanged. She closed the door and Billy came running back to the car.

"He's at the park." Billy tapped on the hood.

“You’re having way too much fun with this.”

“Hell yeah, nothing more satisfying than beating the living shit out of someone.” Billy put it in reverse and whipped his Camaro around and took off down the road.

Steve grabbed the door handle to keep himself from being jostled around. Billy really was having too much fun.

Steve didn’t stop Billy this time and he kind of regretted it, but then he remembered how seedy Michael was and just stared on with a smile on his face. When Billy was done, he wiped his hands off with Michael’s sweatshirt. John and David were there too, both were frozen in place as they looked to Steve for help. Steve put his hands up and got back into Billy’s car. Billy turned around and flipped them the bird as he laughed.

“If you’re hungry I can feed you too, just say the word fuck faces.” Both boys didn’t utter a word as they watched Billy pull off.

“Okay, you done.” Steve asked. He was getting hungry.

“Yeah.” Billy looked genuinely satisfied, and that sickened Steve a bit.

“You hungry?”

Billy checked his watch, it was a little after three. “Nah, not for anything big, gotta be home by five.”

Steve laughed. “What, you gotta date with the folks?” Billy tensed when Steve said that and Steve could sense that tell-tell anger starting to roll. “Take it easy, only joking.”

“You better watch it Harrington.” Billy glared at him.

“Okay, okay.” Steve held up his hands. “Damn Billy you’re like a

loose cannon, you gotta get that checked out.” Steve joked, hoping it carried over well. Billy only stared at him.

“You’re a fucking bitch Harrington, you know that.” Billy smirked as he laughed.

Steve laughed too. “Okay, how about milkshakes?”

“In the middle of winter?” Billy drove down the road.

“Dude, when is it not a good time for milkshakes?”

“I don’t know Steve, probably when it’s not fucking freezing outside.”

“Fine, poor Billy will get too cold, how about a hot coco then? That good enough for you sweetie?” Steve batted his motherly eyes.

Billy punched him in the shoulder. “Where’s the place.”

“Ow, just up the road. Take the next left.”

Billy nodded as he hit the gas, throwing Steve back in his seat.

They were the only ones in line at the ice cream shop and Billy couldn’t keep his eyes off the blonde perky breasted babe taking their order. Every time she moved, everything jiggled. Billy eyed Steve, as if they were in on some kind of inside joke.

“And what can I get you boys.” She smiled sweetly. She wasn’t from their school, but Billy was digging what he was seeing.

Steve stepped in before Billy had time to drop his lines. “Yeah, I’ll have a double chocolate chip milkshake with whipped cream and rainbow sprinkles.”

Billy stared at him. “What are you a child?”

“Shut up, they’re good and the flower ones with the cream on his

too.”

Billy pushed him. “No.”

“It’s okay honey, the sprinkles are the icing on the cake.” She winked at Billy.

“See.” Steve smiled, but Billy only looked at him with disgust.

“And for you hun?” The clerk flashed her big brown eyes.

“What do you recommend?” Billy said as smooth as butter.

“I recommend the cookies and cream milkshake, we use real Oreos.” She flirted back.

“Alright.” Billy winked as the clerk blushed and smiled. Steve paid and dragged Billy away to a booth before he started making out. “I see why you came here Harrington.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “That’s not why.”

“Are you serious, did you see that rack? I could slip a dick through that.” Billy smiled at her when she looked at him.

“That’s disgusting Billy.” Steve got up and tried to adjust his pants. “Let me run to the bathroom real quick.”

Billy leaned back in his booth as Steve half limped to the bathroom. On the way to the men’s room Steve dropped his keys and Billy couldn’t help but notice how big and thick Steve’s ass looked in his jeans. Billy pretended to cough when he realized he had been watching Steve walk away for too long and played it off as he looked out the window.

Steve opened the door to the men’s room and cursed picking up these tight pair of jeans. He walked funny out of the bathroom not

expecting someone to be watching him re-adjusted in the hallway.

“Jeans too tight?” Steve looked up and saw Nancy smirking at him. Steve froze then cracked a nervous smile. “It’s okay, they look good on you.”

“Th-thanks.” Steve blushed a little, his heart still raced whenever Nancy talked to him.

“So you hanging out with Billy now?” She raised an eyebrow.

Steve looked around the corner. “No, I mean, yeah, but we’re cool now.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Steve gave his best convincing look.

“Alright, suit yourself and just an FYI, if you’re into him you don’t have to hide it.” She pushed herself off the wall as she giggled.

“What? No. Nancy.” Steve reached for her, but his restricting pants were much too tight for fast movement. He sighed and wobbled back to the booth.

“Damn Harrington, you borrow a pair of my step sister’s jeans?” Billy smirked.

“Can it Billy.” Steve pinched and pulled at his jeans as Billy laughed at him.

Their milkshakes arrived shortly after and under Billy’s was a number left by the clerk who winked at him as she left. Billy pocketed the number as Steve rolled his eyes.

“Don’t be jealous, you’ll get the hang of this.” Billy teased. Steve kicked him. “Ow, asshole.” Steve grinned as he sucked on his straw. Billy eyed his milkshake, it made him feel like a child, but everyone else seemed to enjoy theirs. He wrapped his rosy colored lips around the straw and sucked, giving himself just a little taste. “Damn, Harrington, this is good.”

“You can call me Steve you know and yes I know, that’s why people come here in the dead of winter.”

“Okay smartass.” Billy grinned as he happily returned to enjoying his milkshake.

It was almost five and Billy raced to get home. He was planning to drop off Steve at his house, but Steve had a friend that lived in Billy’s neighborhood that he wanted to study with. Billy didn’t care either way he just wanted to get home by five to avoid hearing his father’s mouth. Upon turning into his neighborhood Steve began to notice something odd about Billy’s house.

“Hey, is your house on fire?” Steve pointed, as Billy looked ahead. They both could see smoke coming from the back of the house.

“Oh shit!” Billy hit the gas.

“Billy slow down!” Steve shouted.

“Shit!” Billy cursed again. He didn’t see his father’s car in the driveway as he pulled in, but Susan’s car was there but on Sundays she always rode with Neil. Billy got out. The back of the house was definitely on fire. “Shit!” Billy pulled out his hair, when he noticed Max’s bike leaned against the house. “Max!” Billy shouted around. Steve got out of the car. “Where the fuck is Max? Max!” Billy called out. A tinge of fear punctured his heart at the thought of Max still being inside. “Oh fuck.” Billy took off into the house.

“Billy!” Steve shouted to him, but in an instant Billy was already in the house. Panicking, Steve didn’t know what to do. He looked around at Billy’s neighbors and darted towards the closest one. He ran across the yard and pounded on the door, until it opened.

“Can I help you?” A very concerned woman answered the door.

“My friend’s house is on fire, can I use your phone?” Steve said out of

breath as he pointed towards Billy's house.

Mrs. Cornfield looked and gasped. "Yes of course."

The fire hadn't claimed the house yet, but the smoke from the kitchen was pretty thick. Billy coughed as he shielded his eyes from the inferno coming from the kitchen.

"Max!" He shouted as he looked around the den. "Max!" He looked all downstairs, quickly but carefully to make sure she wasn't passed out somewhere. He made a quick dart to the stairs and ran to Max's room. The fire had spread and his parent's room was a blaze just like the rest back of the house. "Max!" Billy said hoarsely as he coughed between breathes. He knew he couldn't stay long, but he couldn't leave without checking. He left her room and flung open the bathroom door. She wasn't there and he prayed that she made it out okay and ran to some neighbor's house. Billy began to feel light headed as he stumbled around upstairs. The fire worsened and it was becoming increasingly hard to breathe. He overstepped, trying to catch his balance on the wall and fell right down the stairs. He took a hard tumble and gashed open the side of his head. Groaning, he rolled over to his stomach. His lungs were burning as he attempted to breath and crawl to the front door. He was so close, but his body was giving up. His vision blurred and he coughed and coughed until the smoke invaded his lungs.

"What the fuck?" Neil looked up at his house as he pulled into his driveway with Susan and Max in the car.

"Oh my gosh." Susan drew her hands to her mouth. Everyone got out and Neil pushed his way past the gathering crowd.

“What the fuck?” Neil was pulling his hair out. He looked around and saw Billy’s car and felt enraged. He son smoked a lot and he swore if his son had anything to do with this he’d put him in the grave.

Steve came running over, out of breath to where Susan and Max were standing. “Is he out?” Steve said in between breaths.

Susan looked at Steve and Max. “What?”

“Billy? Did he come out?” Steve looked around for Billy.

Neil turned when he overheard Steve’s words. He looked at his son’s car and ran over to it. It was empty. “Billy! Billy!” The fire crackled as the flames roared through the side windows. “Billy!” Neil took off towards the front door, as the fire truck sirens screamed.

“Neil!” Susan shouted as she started to cry.

“Mom, no!” Max held her back as she looked at the fire truck behind them.

The entire back side of the house was engulfed with flames as Neil used his arms to cover his face. He hoped to God his son wasn’t in here or upstairs, because it was now impossible to reach the stairs because the ceiling had caved halfway through. Neil took a few more steps in, but the smoke levels were near fatal. His eyes burned but he swore he saw a body lying on the floor. He shut his eyes and stumbled to the floor. It was Billy. Neil scooped him up, bridal style and used every ounce of energy he had to get them both out alive.

Fireman saw them as Neil broke through the flames with a few cuts and burns on his body and collapsed on the ground. Steve, Susan, and Max ran over to them. Neil was coughing and heaving, but Billy was laying there lifeless on his back. Neil’s old army training kicked in as the adrenaline pumped through his body.

“Billy!” Neil shouted as he checked for a pulse. There was none. “Oh Billy!” He shook him, then jumped immediately into CPR. Neil pounded on Billy’s chest forcing his heart to pump, only pausing to give rescue breaths. “Billy come on damn it.” Neil continued CPR.

Steve stood over them, with the image of Billy’s bleeding lifeless

body being etched into his brain. His heart raced as he started to feel short of breath. He couldn't lose Billy too, he was the only other person he felt deeply connected to. Steve's eyes watered as he watched Neil try to save him. The EMTs arrived and broke out their defibrillator.

"Damn it Billy!" Neil shouted. "Please God don't take my son, please! I swear I'll be better! I'll be better!" Tears streamed down his face as he gave more rescue breaths.

"Sir watch out." The EMT got to work on cutting away Billy's shirt to place the shock pads on his chest. The machine charged.

"Please save my son." The tears overflowed through Neil's eyes.

"Clear!" The EMT shouted. No sign of life showed. The EMT tried again after the machine charged again. "Clear!"

"Oh," Neil sobbed with his hand over his mouth. Susan hugged Max tight.

The EMT checked for life, there was none.

"Hit him again damn it! Hit him again!" Neil dropped to his knees. The EMTs looked at each other and let the machine charge up again.

"Clear!" The machine sent volts of electricity to Billy's cardiovascular system and a tiny beep showed that Billy's heart had started, but they had little time to dwell on it or celebrate as the EMTs fixed an air pump around Billy's mouth and raced him over to the ambulance.

"Let me go with him!" Neil shouted. The EMTs looked back as they ran and nodded. "I'll see you at the hospital." Neil shouted to Susan.

"Can I ride with you please?" Steve begged just as Susan and Max were heading to Neil's car. Susan nodded.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

I am really enjoying writing this. =)
More to come. Enjoy.

Recovery

Pain and stress racked the Hargrove family the day after the fire. Billy's injuries were critical and the doctors were telling them not to get their hopes up high. Steve literally broke down when he got home. He had held it together at the hospital all night, even on the car ride to his house, but the floodgates fell when he got home. He ugly cried with his back against the front door and wailed on the floor. Why the hell was this happening to him? Steve trembled as he sobbed. His mother, who was very worried when he didn't return home, came from the back of the house to cradle her son.

"Sugar pea? What's the matter?" His mother wrapped her arms around him.

Steve's dad looked at him with no real concern from his newspaper. "Looks to me like he's going through some high bullshit. Man up will ya."

"Matthew William Harrington if you don't shut your filthy mouth, I'll shut it for you." Mrs. Harrington hissed. Steve's dad backed off as she held her son tight. "It's okay sugar pea, it's okay."

Steve slept good that day, but only because he was so emotionally exhausted his body completely shut down. He woke up sometime around five in the afternoon, with a fresh sandwich and chips at his bedside. With her sixth sense, Mrs. Harrington appeared at Steve's door and leaned against the frame.

“How you feeling sweetie?”

Steve cracked open his eyes. He somehow felt even more tired. He shrugged. His mom walked over to him and sat on his bed. “Don’t worry about school today, I heard on the news about your friend.”

Steve wanted to start crying again and tried to hold it together, but he was failing.

“Let it out baby.” She rubbed his back. “Hey, he’s at my hospital and the doctors and nurses are going to take good care of him. Okay?” She leaned down and kissed him on the forehead. “Okay?”

Steve nodded, but he knew he wouldn’t feel better until he saw his friend awake and smiling again.

Neil and Susan stood as the doctor entered Billy’s room. Billy still had not regained consciousness and the family was hoping for some good news. The doctor smiled softly as he walked in holding his clipboard.

“Good evening Mr. and Mrs. Hargrove. I’m just giving you an update on your son, Billy. He’s stable now, but we’re not certain when he’ll wake up.”

“But he is going to wake up right?” Neil asked anxiously.

The doctor pursed his lips as he looked down at his clipboard. “We hope so.” Neil clenched his fist as Susan wrapped her arms around him. “But he is doing better. We did a head scan on the cut he has on his head. It’s superficial and should heal with minimal scarring. A little cocoa butter will take care of scarring if you’re concerned. Mr. Hargrove does your son smoke?”

Neil nodded. “Yeah.”

“Well he needs to quit immediately, the condition of his lungs is in such a terrible state for a boy of his age. That is the main thing

hindering his recovery.” The Doctor warned.

Susan gripped Neil’s shoulders and spoke. “Well you don’t have to worry about that, I’ll make sure Billy never touches another cigarette again.”

The doctor nodded. “I’ll update you as more developments arise. He’s on a pain medication, but I want to keep him on oxygen to help with his breathing.”

“Thank you.” Susan watched the doctor leave.

Neil paced the room in anger. “Why the hell can’t they tell me if my son is going to wake up or not?” Neil balled up his fist.

“Neil, they’re doing the best they can.”

“Are they!” Neil shouted, bringing Susan to tears. “Are they Susan!”

Steve didn’t feel like leaving his house yesterday, but he couldn’t bear another day in his home with his father whispering about him and his mother worrying. So he mustered up the energy to go to school, but on the inside he was falling apart. He did not sleep well last night. His night terrors attacked him with images of Billy’s helpless body sinking into the ground and there was nothing Steve could do about it. He gave up on sleep when the night terrors started focusing on Dustin again. It was all too much to bear, so he sat in first period looking like a corpse.

The lunch bell ring and Steve was the first one to race out of class. He needed the fresh air. He felt hot and dizzy, and emotionally exhausted. The fluorescent lighting and ticking of the clock made him feel like the room was caving in and it made it hard for him to breathe. Steve collapsed on a bench out in the courtyard and rested his head on his arm. He really felt like he was dying.

“You okay?” Steve turned his head to see the salmon colored fuzz of

Nancy's sweater. Steve hadn't the energy to say anything, so he just smiled as he tried to control his breathing.

"You look like shit." Nancy sat her books down on the table and sat down next to him. Steve buried his head. He was sweating and shaking and she was sure he hadn't noticed, because he ran out of the classroom so fast he forgot his jacket. "Hey, hey" Nancy rubbed his back.

"I-" Steve stuttered.

"It's okay Steve, I get it."

Steve leaned up. "Nancy, I"

"Hey, I get it, you're worried about Billy. He's going to be okay."

"But how do you know that." He snapped. "I'm sorry."

Nancy didn't appear mad, she only smiled softly. "Steve, don't think I haven't noticed how strange you've been acting after, well you know." She didn't even want to risk saying it out loud. "And then you get close to Billy and then his house catches on fire. I know what it feels like to really be worried about a friend, but you can't be a support for him if you don't take care of yourself first. You need to talk to someone."

"How? I can't even talk about that." Steve's eyes flashed with a mix of sadness and anger.

"I know and I don't mean that. I mean what's going on with you now. I mean how this is making you feel. You don't have to suffer alone. I didn't." Nancy leaned down and fished for a card in her purse. "Here, this guy really helped me when I was feeling lost. It's honestly the best thing my parents have done for me." Steve took the card, it was for a therapist. "I know we're not dating anymore, but I still care about you as a friend and as a friend I can't sit back and watch you tear yourself apart."

Steve nodded as he crumbled. He was hot with embarrassment as he started to cry in Nancy's arms. She held him with no judgment, it felt so good. Steve squeezed her back.

The cause of the fire was determined to be electrical, which only added more fuel to Neil's rage. He had gotten no sleep the night before, because the hospital had called and said Billy's condition had worsened. Neil's heart stopped when the nurses told him that Billy had little time left. So in the dead of night Neil and his family rushed to Billy's side. After hours of intense worry and another setback, when Billy's heart stopped, the doctors were finally able to stabilize him. Now Neil was in the hotel, forced by Susan, because she said he needed some air.

The fire chief called and gave him the update and Neil was near the breaking point when he got the news. He just got a new job, only to lose his home. Little could be saved and it was looking like the house would need to be re-built and they had no money for that. Their savings were blown moving to Hawkins.

Susan opened the door with one hand as she tried to balance their lunch in the other. "I hope I didn't keep you waiting for too long." She smiled.

"Where the hell have you been?" Neil snapped. She had the car and he was eager to get back to the hospital. Susan stopped, but composed herself as she sat the food on the table. Neil crossed the room and grabbed her arm. "Did you hear me?"

Susan didn't look at him. "I got sandwiches and chips, we have water in the room."

Neil squeezed harder, but eventually let her go. "I don't give a fuck about some sandwiches Susan." Neil turned around and knocked a vase off an end table. It smashed against a wall, which made Susan flinch. She was near tears when she slammed her hands on the table.

"You're not the only one suffering Neil. I care about Billy too, my money went into this move too. You think I'm not affected by this? My stuff, my mother's stuff burned. You think this is fun for me

Neil?" Her face was red and wet from tears. "I swear your anger is out of control sometimes. It makes me, it makes me so angry sometimes Neil. And you know what, you keep this up, you keep this up and me and Max just might leave." She trembled as she sobbed. Neil clenched his jaw, but didn't look at her. "Billy needs you right now, dammit Neil I need you right now. You need to do something about your temper, you need help Neil." She completely broke down as Neil's expression softened. He walked over to her and hugged and kissed her on the head.

"I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry Susan." He hugged her tight.

Later that night Steve asked his mom if she could take him to see Billy. Steve hadn't seen him in three days and he wasn't sure he was ready to go now, but he had to for his own sanity. His mother agreed and drove him up to the hospital. She was so worried about Steve she told him not to worry about school tomorrow, because Steve honestly looked like a train wreck.

Half expecting to run into Billy's family Steve was surprised to see that they weren't there when he got there. It was after eight and they still had Max to look after and Steve was sure that they were just as stressed as he was if not more. Steve stopped at Billy's room and took several deep breaths before entering. He wasn't sure what horrors were in store for him, his mind was tormenting him with images of what Billy looked like when his father pulled him out of the house. Steve took a deep breath and opened the door. He was calmed by how quiet it was in Billy's room. A soft beeping ensured Steve that Billy was still alive. Steve opened his eyes, as he tried to control his breathing, to the sight of Billy sleeping peacefully in his bed. There was a thick white bandage wrapped around his head, displacing his curly blonde hair. Tubes and IVs were placed neatly on his body, making it seem like they belonged there. Steve mustered a smile. Billy looked at peace. Steve grabbed a chair and pulled it close to Billy's bed and said nothing for a long time. He just watched Billy sleep.

“You better fucking wake up Billy.” Steve reached out and grabbed Billy’s hand and squeezed it. “You better fucking wake up.” Steve sniffled as he trembled.

It was three in the morning when Neil got the call from the hospital. He swore his heart stopped when he got the news. He thanked and thanked the doctors as he shook Susan awake. Billy had finally wakened up. Susan told Neil to go up there so they wouldn’t have to wake Max. She had been strong for them, but Susan could tell Max was starting to worry about Billy too. Neil nodded and rushed to get dressed. The hospital wasn’t far and he got there in five minutes as there was no traffic on the roads at three o’clock in the morning. Neil rushed to the nurse’s station to check in and the nurses confirmed what the doctor had said. He was okay to visit his son, who was barely awake, but awake enough to see his family.

Neil broke through the threshold of Billy’s room to see his son staring off into space. Billy heard someone approach and when he saw that it was his father he got scared. “Billy!” Billy flinched, but was shocked to see his father crying and running up to him kissing him on the forehead. “Dammit Billy, I’m so sorry, dammit. I’m so glad you’re awake.” His father’s tears wanted to make him cry too. Billy closed his eyes and calmed himself as he allowed himself to be held by his father.

The sun rose and phones calls went out to anyone who could help the Hargrove family. Billy was still stable, but the doctors would not discharge him until he was breathing strongly on his own. Their new neighbors, the Cornfields, reached out to them and offered their house as a place for them to stay as long as they wanted. The Cornfields were an older couple, who had grown kids who moved out

already, so they had the extra space. Susan was so grateful; she didn't know how she could ever repay them.

Another piece of good news that came that day was from the police chief, apparently their house was one of the unlisted houses, shady company, Beans and Grace's Electrical had done. Currently there was a lawsuit against the company for willful negligence, but nothing was able to stick with any real consequences because there were minimal damages and no injuries from their negligence and the company offered to fix all the problems free of charge. That changed when the county lawyer got word that the Hargrove's house was one of the houses Beans and Grace's had done which breached the conditions of the court order that specifically stated that they needed to disclose all properties involved. Now, because of their dishonesty a family had lost their home and almost their child.

Susan was shocked but relieved, her family would receive a lot of money once the case settled and then they would be able to rebuild their home. Susan thanked the Cornfields again and hung up the phone. Neil had finally come home from the hospital and passed out on the bed after he gave her an update. She told Max the good news and promised to take her up to the hospital later after school. Lastly, Susan phoned Steve. She was happy that Billy had made a close friend. She wanted him to be happy here, knowing that the move was something that was really stressful for him. She phoned Steve's mom told her to let Steve know he was allowed to visit just as long as Billy was stable and during the daytime hours. Steve's mom was elated to hear the news and said that she was glad her son was okay.

Fast forward a few hours and Steve found himself racing into the hospital. His mom dropped him off and he was out of the car the minute the car stopped. Steve knew the way by heart and maneuvered around people in his race to the elevator. He saw a half-empty one just about to close and flagged it down, shouting for them to hold the door. He was grateful they did and stood in the box grinning like a child. Once the doors opened he thanked them again

and rushed to Billy's room. He stopped and took long deep breaths as he composed himself.

"Alright Steve, he's okay, he's okay, he's okay." Steve shut his eyes and forced himself to believe it before opening the door. "Hi." Steve waved like a nervous date and forced a goofy looking smile on his face. Billy looked tired and just stared at him as Steve awkwardly fumbled around the room for a chair. "Ouch, sorry." Steve tripped as he tried to pull a chair next to Billy's bed. He looked back at Billy, Billy was grinning, it was small and barely lit up his face, but that showed that Billy was still there. "How you feeling buddy?" Steve sat down and planted his hands in his lap.

Billy blinked slowly and just laid there and breathed. It was hard for him to talk, so he rose up his hand and gave a thumbs-up instead.

Steve smiled and unconsciously reached out and grabbed Billy's hand. "I was so fucking worried about you." He looked into Billy's eyes. "Don't you ever do that shit again."

Billy coughed and looked down at Steve's hand. Steve was holding it pretty tight, but the pressure he was feeling was that of love not anger. Billy's cheeks reddened. This kind of kindness was rare to him and it made him feel small and nervous. "Fuck off." He managed to mutter hoarsely.

Steve stared at him for a few moments, then broke out into the biggest smile he could muster. "Shut up asshole and hurry up and get better. We still have to try the hot dog place off main and the pizza place off Rockingsfort. So don't pussyfoot around and waste my time okay?" Steve was flustered this time, as he looked down at the floor.

Billy stared at Steve's thick brown hair and smiled. "Okay."

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

The end is near!
Maybe... xD
Enjoy.

Spring Time

The Hargrove's were settling in nicely with their new neighbors, the Cornfields. They were still in financial limbo with the courts and the shady Beans and Grace's electrical company. While the timeline of when things would get back to normal was uncertain, progress was being made. Their lawyers were positive their house could be rebuilt in the middle of summer. It was mid-March now, so the family would have to hold tight just a little longer.

Billy was doing much better, but his road to recovery was wrought with setbacks, because of the poor condition of his lungs. He was out of school for weeks. Steve, however, was there to help and made sure Billy got his coursework. He helped Billy stay on top of his school work so he wouldn't have to repeat the twelve grade. Billy was grateful, even though he didn't show it. These days he was too tired to make a fuss and wished he could get better so he could return to his normal life.

The doorbell rang at the Cornfield's house and Nate Cornfield answered and opened the door. "Steve." He greeted the boy with a big smile and let him in. "Billy's upstairs, will you be staying for dinner?"

"Only if you want me to Mr. Cornfield, I don't want to impose." Steve said, as he shifted his heavy backpack on his shoulders.

"Nonsense Steve, you are always welcome here." Nate smiled widely as Steve nodded and went upstairs. Nate and Marsha's kids were all grown now and they missed a packed house, especially one with kids.

They dreamed of the day their children would give them grandkids, until then they were satisfied with helping their neighbors out.

Steve walked upstairs to Billy's room and lightly knocked on the door. "Yo, you decent?"

Billy didn't want to honor that with a response. This was their newest inside joke for Steve to ask if Billy was decent before entering, because a few weeks ago Steve asked to come in and in Billy's drugged up state he said yes. The only problem was that Billy forgot he was completely bottomless. Steve blushed so hard that day from laughing, as it took Billy a whole five minutes to figure out why Steve was laughing. Billy still got upset about it, but nothing with any real bite.

"Shut up and get in here." Billy retorted.

Steve cracked open the door, pretending to be cautious as he covered his eyes. "Okay, but there better not be any dicks out." A pillow was met with Steve's face as Billy flipped him off. "Ouch." Steve laughed.

Billy was looking a lot better, but he was barred from any strenuous physical activity and 100 percent banned from his favorite smoking habit. From Billy's prospective this was like being in prison, but to Steve he thought Billy looked much healthier.

"What's on the menu tonight?" Billy pointed to the books Steve was unpacking.

"Pre-calculus," Steve stuck out his tongue.

Billy shrugged. "Okay, easy enough."

"Easy? Are you serious?" The expression on Steve's face was one of absolute disgust.

Billy coughed a little and walked over to the nightstand to take a sip of water. "It's just pre-calc."

"Just? This is the devil's work, I swear." Steve threw the book down.

"Yeah, maybe for an idiot like you." Billy laughed as he sat on his

bed.

“Dude, you do realize most people hate math, it fucking sucks.” Steve eyed him, Billy shrugged again. “What? You think you’re some kind of super genius?”

“It’s pre-calculus, not heart surgery.” Billy started to laugh, he was trying hard not to laugh too much, but the look on Steve’s face was not helping.

“Honestly, what’s the difference? I’ll be lucky to pass this class.” Steve said with a deflated look.

“Wait, wait, wait, how can you expect to help me if you’re failing?” Billy looked bemused.

“I’m not failing, I have a C for your information.”

“I have an A.” Billy clapped back.

Steve sat there with his mouth open. “How?”

Billy only continued to stare at him with a smug look on his face. “Harrington, you’re a riot.”

“It’s Steve and you’re a freakazoid, because only freaky weird people are good at math.” Steve was convinced as he cracked open the book to the next chapter. All Billy could do was laugh, wheezing in between. “Hey, don’t overdo it, freak for brains.”

Billy held his gut and laid down on the bed. “Yeah, because I’m going to wow people with my trigonometry skills. You’re an idiot Harrington.”

“Steve.” Steve corrected.

Billy shook his head. “You’re an idiot Steve.” And rustled up Steve’s hair.

Love was in the air, at least for Billy Hargrove. It was April and Billy was back in school. Senior prom was right around the corner and he seemed to get asked out just about every day from girls all over town. It was flattering but he wasn't the type to stick with just one girl. Despite his health being on the rocks, he still got around and Steve swore he saw him hanging on a new girl every week. Steve wasn't jealous or anything it just annoyed him for some reason to see him slip into bed with any girl that showed him even the slightest bit of attention.

Billy waited in Steve's driveway for him to come out. He blasted his favorite AC/DC song and tapped his fingers on the door. Steve came out and ran to his car.

"You're late." Billy looked at him.

Steve closed the door. "You're early." Steve retorted, then sniffed around. "Billy, your car smells like ass and pussy."

Billy grinned wider than Steve had ever seen him before. "Yeah, is that a problem?"

Steve made a disgusted look on his face. "I hope you clean your car after your little hook-ups."

Billy laughed as he turned on the car. "So this prom thing is a big deal around here huh?" Billy sped down the road.

Steve shrugged, sure if this were past Steve he would be trying to hook-up with the hottest girl in school, but now he didn't care anymore. "Eh, I'm more excited about Tonya Clover's party in two weeks. It's going to be epic."

"Oh yeah?" Billy glanced over at him. "Tonya's the dark chick with the double d's?"

Steve eyed him. "Yeah, but her parent's place is nice."

Billy nodded. "Okay, well count me in."

“Cool.” Steve nodded, as he enjoyed the ride, window down with the wind blowing through his dark brown hair. It was moments like these he really enjoyed.

It was night time and Steve sat on Billy’s bed in the midst of a sea of jeans and shirts. Despite the fact that they lost their home and most of their belongings, it didn’t stop Susan Hargrove from raiding the Goodwill. Now Steve was struggling to keep a straight face as he watched Billy try on pants. This was how they were now, they were comfortable with each other, but kept each other at an emotional arm’s length and Steve didn’t mind this. There was still so much he couldn’t tell Billy, but this budding friendship was the anchor Steve needed to keep himself from floating away.

“How about these?” Billy walked out from behind the closet door and turned around in front of Steve. Steve grinned, then busted out into laughter. Billy’s face turned from that of feeling confident to annoyed. “I don’t know why I bother asking you.” Billy walked over to the mirror and eyed his butt. He thought the pair of jeans looked nice, but was annoyed Steve wasn’t taking this as serious.

“Dude, you’re asking me to tell you which pair of jeans make your ass look good.” Steve snickered, but Billy didn’t laugh. “Okay, fine. I like them, okay.”

“No you don’t.” Billy shook his hand. He was really craving a cigarette right now and gave up in frustration and went back into the closet.

“Hey Billy, come on.”

“Can it Harrington.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “Billy, it’s Steve, Steve.” He said it slower the second time for effect, but Billy had nothing to retort and Steve was starting to worry he had taken his jokes too far. “Okay, the ripped

knees one looked the best.”

Billy listened from the closet door. “The ones with the one or two cut knees?” Billy asked just to make sure Steve was actually paying attention.

“The two cut knees pair, the ones that actually looked warn in, but not warned.”

Billy stepped out of the closet in his briefs and searched the floor. Steve watched uncomfortably as Billy tossed pairs of jeans around. Something in Steve's gut always turned when he saw Billy with fewer clothes on. He wasn't sure why, but it always made his heart race.

“These?” Billy picked up a pair.

“Hold them out so I can see.” Billy did as he was told. “Yeah.”

Billy turned them around and nodded as he put them on. They were extra tight and Billy had to do a little work to pull them over his butt and zip them up. Steve cringed at the restrictiveness, but Billy's body filled them out as if they were made for him.

“What do you think?” Billy held his out his hands.

“Turn around.” Steve made the hand motion. Billy sighed, but did as he was told. “Stop.” Steve eyed Billy's butt.

“Well?” Billy turned around and noticed Steve staring at his butt and it made him feel a little awkward. “Well?”

“Okay, okay, they're fine.”

Billy turned around. “Just fine?” He turned and looked at himself in the mirror. He needed them to be more than just fine.

“Yeah.” But Steve sensed that that was not enough to convince his friend. “I mean if you're looking for a pair of jeans that make your ass pop and scream fuck me now then that's your pair.”

Billy grinned in the mirror as he licked his lips. “Yeah.”

Steve had realized how hot and bothered he was starting to get watching Billy trying to be seductive in the mirror. Why was he feeling this way? And about Billy Hargrove to say the least. Billy turned around and snapped his fingers at his zoned out friend.

“Earth to Steve.” Billy snapped his fingers again. “If I didn’t know any better I’d say you’re checking me out Harrington.” Billy joked, but Steve reddened, not the reaction Billy was hoping for, which made him feel a little too naked in front of his friend. “I’m going to change, you hungry?”

“Yeah, I could go for something.” Steve snapped himself out of his stupor and hopped to his feet.

“Cool, I know a place.” Billy went into his closet and changed and found the most loss fitting outfit he could find. He didn’t like the expression Steve was giving him, because inside of Steve’s eyes was that familiar look people gave him right before they were about to hurt him.

It was Friday, the day of Tonya Clover’s party, Billy was pretty pumped about it. The Hawkins students may have lived out in the middle of nowhere, but they sure knew how to throw a party. Billy pulled into the school’s parking lot, music blasting, and sat there for a moment and waited for the familiar sound of Steve’s car. He checked himself out in the rearview mirror as he drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. He moved away a few strands of blonde hair out of his face when there was a light tap on his window. Billy turned and saw a small group of girls standing next to his car. Billy grinned.

Steve arrived shortly after and parked and got out of his car. He saw Billy across the parking lot talking to a few juniors. Steve shook his head. He didn’t see the appeal but the girls were falling all over him. When Billy saw Steve, Billy nodded at him. The girls giggled, but walked away by the time Steve reached Billy.

“Hey,” Billy greeted Steve with their usual hand shake. “You ready for tonight?” He winked as he looked at all the girls walking by. Steve shrugged. “Hey, I can’t pick you up tonight, I’m meeting a few girls at the party and I don’t want you to be the third wheel or anything. Plus I’m probably going to crush at that chick’s place.”

“It’s okay, I was planning to drive myself anyways.” Steve said with a little frustration in his voice.

It was easy for Billy to pick up on this, sensing hostility was his God-given gift. “You okay?”

“I don’t know Billy, it seems like you spend more time fucking girls than anything else.”

“What? You jealous or something?” Billy escalated the situation by stepping in Steve’s face.

Steve side stepped him, Billy was too close and besides he couldn’t figure out why Billy’s sexual habits bothered him in the first place. “Never mind.” Steve turned and walked away.

“Hold on.” Billy grabbed Steve’s arm. “What’s your fucking problem Harrington? If you want pussy there is plenty to go around, but don’t get mad at me because you keep striking out.” Billy let go of Steve’s arm and walked away, leaving Steve standing there mad and alone.

The day flew by and the last bell rang as the students flooded out. Steve and Billy hadn’t talked much during the day and it was not how Steve wanted things to be. Steve ran out to his car to see if Billy had left already, he hadn’t. Billy stood next to his car, digging through it when Steve ran over.

Steve stopped and stared at his friend, who was head deep inside of his car and joked. “Nice ass Hargrove.”

Billy looked under his arm, then pulled out and stood up. Steve was

standing there as smug as he could be. "Thanks." Billy raised his eyebrow. "I wish I could say the same Harrington, but you're not packing much back." Billy clapped back.

Steve looked at his own ass. "Oh so you checking me out Hargrove?" Steve said a lot more confident than he expected. Billy grinned, but it started to fade after a while. "What? Cat got your tongue?" Steve didn't know why he was continuing this, normally this would be super awkward, but the stumped look on Billy's face was just too amusing.

Billy turned around and shook his head. "Whatever man."

"Hey, I'm sorry about before." Steve said as he tucked his hands into his pockets.

Billy pulled out the one lone cigarette, he had found in his car. "It's no big deal."

"Billy." Steve eyed the cigarette.

"What?" Billy looked at him. Steve's glare was near Susan level. Steve held out his hand. "No way, this is my last one."

"I will kick your ass right here and now." Steve did not withdraw his hand. Billy thought for a second about actually fighting Steve, but for some reason he didn't feel like it.

Billy flung the cigarette in the grass. "You happy now?" Billy got in Steve's face.

"Back up, and I better not catch you lighting one of those things up again." Steve did not back down, but Billy started to laugh.

"You're so weird man, get in."

"I drove today."

"Oh fuck that's right, well you need a ride for tonight?" Billy asked again.

"What happened to your hot date?" Steve raised an eyebrow.

Billy shrugged. "I got too many numbers to keep up with who I'm doing. If you need a ride."

Steve stared at Billy for a second. "Billy I swear you're going to catch something." He laughed and Billy laughed a little too. "How about I give you and your sex wagon some space tonight? Who knows what's growing in there."

Billy looked at Steve and a small smile formed on his face. "Suit yourself," Billy opened his door. "Hey, I'll save you the ugly ones." Billy flashed a grin before hopping in and cranking up his music and pulling off.

Steve stood back and waved the dust from his face. "Asshole." He smiled as he watched Billy's blue Camaro fly down the road.

Billy greatly underestimated the teenagers of Hawkins high school, Tonya Clover's house party was popping. Her house was bigger than Steve's and had a big pool in the back yard, just like the ones back in California. It was still a little chilly for swimming, but that didn't stop the band of drunk teenagers from diving right in. Billy stumbled around the house, laughing and socializing with the people. He hadn't seen Steve since the start of the evening, but he hoped he was having a good time.

A few girls from the neighboring high school winked at Billy and he looked them up and down. They blushed and giggled as they walked away. He was indeed going to have a good night tonight.

Steve to was having a good time too as he leaned against a wall talking to a hot junior on the cheerleading squad. Her name was Wanda Clark and Steve had been wanting to talk to her ever since she filled out, but the drama with Nancy put his damper on his playboy skills. She hung on his every word, all Steve had to do was smile and she would melt into a blushing mess. He was enjoying himself. Wanda grabbed Steve's hands and nodded to the other side

of the house. This was Hawkins' code for, congratulations son you're getting laid. Steve looked down the hall, then back at her with a smooth grin on his face. He wrapped his arms around her waist and led the way.

At many of Tonya's parties Steve remembered taking girls to the back guest rooms. Tonya's house was just that big. Steve found a small empty room and flicked on the lights. Wanda bounced in his arms as she kissed him. It felt so good, Steve kissed back as he led her to the bed. All was going well, except for the fact that his dick didn't seem to be as excited. Steve chopped it up to not having sex for a long time and focused on Wanda as she slipped through his legs. She blow kisses at him as she undid his pants and slid down the zipper. Steve closed his eyes, begging his body to allow him to enjoy this.

"Um, Steve." Wanda stopped and stared at his flaccid dick. "You're a little, um, flat down here."

Steve opened his eyes and looked down. "Oh it's fine, it just needs a little charging up." Wanda eyed him, then shrugged, as she went down on him. Steve grunted softly, but he was still having a hard time focusing on the task at hand. Wanda worked him, but his dick appeared to be in dreamland.

"Ah, maybe I should come back." Wanda started to get up.

"No, Wanda." Steve stood up. "It works, I swear."

"Are you sure? Because it looks a little, uninterested to me." Wanda pointed to Steve's still flaccid dick. Steve looked down and never felt so betrayed in his entire life.

Steve looked up. "Wanda." She was already straightening up her hair and outfit.

"It's no biggie Steve, it happens sometimes. See you around." She turned and walked out of the room.

Steve had never felt this humiliated in his life. The one time he tries to have sex and his dick clocks out. What was wrong with him? He turned and wiped his face with his hands. He stared down at his dick

and cursed as he tucked himself back in.

“Hey! Way to go!” A completely drunk Billy slurred as he stumbled in.

Steve turned around and stared at him, he was not ready to hear Billy’s mouth.

“Woo,” Billy struggled to keep his balance. “Things didn’t turn out well?” Billy tried to be serious, but he was way too drunk to be sincere. “What happened? Dat’chick wassa babe.”

“Billy I don’t want to talk about it right now.” Steve walked past him and stopped when he smelled the alcohol on him. “Dammit Billy, you reek.” Steve looked at the door.

“What?” Billy stood there, just looking at him.

“You need to take a time out.” Steve walked over to the door and closed it. “Here, you need to sleep this off buddy.”

Billy burst into laughter. “All that ass out there and you worried about me?” Billy’s face was turning red as he laughed and coughed at the same time. Steve ignored him. “What? What?” Billy looked at Steve’s annoyed face. “I can get you ah’nother girl or is,” Billy pointed to Steve’s dick. “Or is, little Steve having trouble.” He was only teasing, but when Steve’s face turned red with anger, Billy lost it and nearly fell on the floor. “Oh shit, your shit clocked out on you. That’s fucking rich, fucking rich Har-ton.”

“Harrington! I mean Steve! You can at least get that right.” Steve was so embarrassed he wanted to punch Billy in the face.

“Hey,” Billy crossed the room into Steve’s space. In his drunken state he was so close Steve could smell the alcohol on his breath. “I gotta secret for fixing dick problems.” Billy slurred as he stared directed into Steve’s eyes. Steve swallowed hard, as a familiar feeling built in his gut. Billy grinned and went in for a kiss, completely shocking Steve.

Steve’s first instinct was to push him away, but his body was on fire the moment their lips touched as if Billy had unlocked some deep

hidden desire. Steve opened his mouth and immediately Billy's tongue invaded the space, earning a throaty moan from Steve. Billy pulled away and looked at how completely wrecked Steve looked and lost it. Billy pushed Steve against the door and kissed him so deeply Steve felt completely overwhelmed. Billy slipped a leg in between Steve's legs causing Steve trembled. All the gates were down now, Steve wanted more and pushed Billy to the bed, but Steve's control didn't last long as Billy pulled him into his arms roughly. There was nothing but rough kisses and grabby hands as Billy fought with Steve's pants to pull them down. Steve panted then looked down in shock as his dick was standing erect and hard before Billy. Steve had little time to dwell on this as Billy's mouth was on his dick in a matter of seconds. Steve yelped and thrust forward, as Billy took the whole thing in. Steve was shocked but was slowly losing his mind as Billy worked him with his experienced tongue.

Satisfied with the look of Steve's wet hard dick, Billy released his and moaned as he stroked his own hard dick, then grabbed and stroked Steve's. The sounds Steve was making was making Billy's entire body hot and hungry for a good fucking and he could tell Steve wanted it too. Billy wiped up some pre-cum with his fingers and slipped a finger into Steve's ass. Steve yelped again and used Billy's shoulders to brace himself. Billy slipped in another finger and worked him open as Steve lifted his leg onto the bed to give Billy better access. Billy worked in another finger causing Steve to hiss.

"Fuck! Billy!" Steve shouted.

Billy withdrew his fingers and pushed Steve's ass towards his dick. Billy sled his slick dick threw Steve's cheeks, earning himself a moan, before he lifted up Steve's ass and slid himself in. Steve hissed, then cried out as he lowered himself down. It was painful and Steve felt like he was being torn apart. Billy slowed Steve's descent, allowing time for Steve to adjust. Steve hissed but relaxed, making it easier for Billy to slide in. Once in Billy lifted Steve a little and allowed him to drop. Steve choked and quivered in Billy's arms, but rutted for more. Feeding off this Billy had Steve riding his dick cowgirl style and with every thrust Billy was turning Steve into a withering mess.

"Billy! You fucking, Ah!." Steve threw his head back.

Billy picked up the pace, until he felt that familiar burn in his gut. Billy fucked him harder until he felt Steve's body constrict. Steve came first, then Billy. The two collapsed on the bed, both a panting mess.

Three days, it had been three days since Steve and Billy did the deed and to Billy it was like nothing happened. Steve would make obvious awkward glances at Billy, anything to get his attention, but nothing. Steve was beginning to think Billy was too drunk to remember what happened, because the following morning when Steve woke up next to Billy, Steve was so embarrassed he hightailed it out of there before Billy could wake up.

Two more days passed and Steve was beginning to think Billy really didn't remember. Billy was really drunk that night, that's what Steve told himself. Steve slowly convinced himself that it was a mistake, a fluke, but the trouble with trying to forget was that buried secrets always resurfaced. And thus Steve found himself feeling anxious all the time, on top of his normal sleep-deprived self. Now hanging out with Billy made him feel stressed out which made all their conversations short and tense. Things had gotten so bad, that Steve was starting to avoid Billy. It angered Steve that Billy could carry on like nothing happened. Things reached a boiling point when Billy even joked about that night, completely stumping on the fact that something major had happened between them that he refused to acknowledge.

Two weeks pasted and it was mid-April. Steve was now avoiding Billy like the plague. Steve made sure to leave his home extra early for school, so Billy couldn't pick him up. Steve ducked out of school quickly to avoid conversations. If Billy missed a day in school, Steve

would deliver his missing work but only to Susan or through Dustin who would give it to Max. This little game of hide and seek was really hard to keep up with and things were further complicated when Steve's car broke down. He wasn't going to be caught dead riding the bus to school, he hated riding the bus, but he needed a ride. So his mother, using her six sense motherly skills, called up Billy and asked if he could pick him up. Sometimes her motherly senses were not helpful, but Steve would be lying if he said he didn't notice the way Billy looked at him. Steve ducked out of every potential conversation and Steve saw it in Billy's eyes that it was hurting him. So Steve was surprised when his mother said Billy had agreed to pick him up.

"Steve!" Mrs. Harrington called from downstairs. "Billy is here."

Steve dreaded going downstairs, but grabbed his backpack and headed to the front door anyways. "Thanks mom." He mustered a fake smile.

She smiled at him and held the door open. "You and Billy okay? I haven't seen him come around lately."

"We're fine." Steve lied.

"Okay." She smiled at him and kissed him on the forehead. She saw Billy in his Camaro and waved. Billy smiled and waved back. Steve sighed and walked towards Billy's car. "Have a good day at school honey."

Steve turned and waved, but he'd be lucky to make it to school the way his morning was going. Steve opened the door and got in. Billy said nothing, he didn't even look at him as he pulled off. The music was off, that was a bad sign, and Billy was taking his time this morning. They stopped at a stop light and Billy looked away. He seemed agitated which was no surprise to Steve, after all he had been blowing him off. The light turned green and Billy pulled off. The silence was heavy in the car, it was so tense Steve felt like it was crushing him. This was too much for Steve, he was already stressed out and even more so with his car out of commission. Steve swore he wanted to punch his dad as he blamed everything on Steve, even though it wasn't his fault. Billy stopped at another stoplight and

Steve had had enough, he slammed his hands on the side of his door.

“Seriously Billy what the hell is up?” Steve turned and looked at Billy.

Billy shot back a nasty glare, then took off down the road and whipped into the nearest parking lot and killed the engine. “Is that a serious fucking question?” Hot with anger Steve knew he was treading on thin ice, but Steve didn’t care.

“Yes.” Steve snapped back. Billy looked absolutely pissed and shook his leg as he scratched his face.

“I’m fucking done with you, I’m fucking done.” Billy reached over to his keys to start the car again, but Steve stopped him. “Get the fuck off me.” He elbowed him away. “You know, you’re the one that’s been fucking acting weird.”

“Me?” Steve pointed at himself. “Me? Seriously? Seriously? Okay, so we’re not going to talk about it?” When Billy said nothing Steve let loose. “Are you fucking kidding me? You can’t be man enough to talk to me after we fucked and you say I’m the one acting fucking weird? Me?” Billy said nothing, but he was noticeably mad. He didn’t even look at Steve. “I don’t care that we fucked, it’s not a big deal, I just want to know where we stand? Because my mind is tearing me the fuck apart and I don’t need this shit. So what the fuck is going on?”

Billy’s face was red and he still didn’t look Steve in the eyes. He stared out the window, tapping his foot up and down. “I don’t, I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” Steve said vindictively. “Well that’s great, the one fucking subject Billy Hargrove sucks at is talking about his feelings.” Steve turned and looked out the window.

Billy looked at him with so much hurt in his eyes and Steve finally turned around and caught a glimpse of Billy’s expression. Billy broke eye contact and immediately turned the car on and sped off. This was bad, whatever was going on this was bad. Steve knew it, but all he wanted was some clarification. Steve didn’t want to lose his friend, his pretty much only high school friend. Dustin was too young to talk

about these things and he wasn't going to breathe a word about this to Nancy. Billy was speeding fast and Steve knew this would be his one and only chance to rectify this.

"Hey, I didn't say it was shitty." Steve mumbled as he looked out the window. Billy turned and looked at him, Steve could feel his laser eyes burning into his neck but Steve didn't say anything. Billy sped more, this time turning on his music to near ear deafening levels. Steve stared at Billy like he was being a child, but said nothing as Billy stopped at a stop sign. Steve sighed, then reached over and turned the music off. "Hey, I said I didn't think it was shitty. I mean it was new for me, but not shitty." Billy stared at him. "What I'm trying to say is that," Steve took a deep breath, his stomach was now in knots. "Was it something more? Are we a thing now?"

Oh, the rage in Billy's heart wanted so badly to crush Steve's feelings into a million pieces. Billy wanted to give Steve the big 'fuck no', but at the same time his heart was desperately reaching out for someone to hold onto. His father's kind words could not erase the years of domestic violence or the years spent alone crying for his mother. Billy's life was a rocky boat of uncertainty and the way Steve had been treating him over the past few weeks were tearing him apart. Billy wished they never had sex that night, he wanted to stay as friends. That was safe. Friendship was something Billy could manage, romantic relationships were a whole new territory. Billy choked a little, then coughed, then shrugged.

"I, I don't know, what the fuck do you want me to say?" Billy wouldn't dare ask what he really wanted to know, the risk, the rejection, if this relationship with Steve folded. It would be the end for Billy.

Steve sighed. Billy was one stubborn guy, but he wasn't lashing out, which was a good sign. Steve took a deep breath. "I'm not going to make you say anything, but I will say, that I ah, kind of liked it." Billy pulled into the school's parking lot and killed the engine. He looked into to Steve's eyes kind of surprised. "So yeah, if you want to do more of that, I'm okay with that." Steve smiled, then unbelted his seatbelt and got out of the car. Halfway out Steve stopped and looked at the stunned Billy. "You coming Hargrove?" Billy blinked several times. The look in Steve's eyes, had Billy's heart racing.

“You’re so fucking weird Harrington.” Billy forced out, his face reddened, as Steve smiled. Steve guessed that this was as close to a confirmation he was going to get and he was okay with that.

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

Almost done. One more after this.

=)

Graduation Pt. 1

May was ending, and everyone was gearing up to take final exams. Steve was feeling nervous about some of his classes, but with some extra encouragement from Billy, meaning they were on a sex strike, Steve kicked it into high gear to finish off his final year with a bang. The boys took their Government exam today, and all that was left was Physics, which was on Monday. Both Steve and Billy needed to buckle down if they wanted to pass.

Billy drove, as the two headed for the pizza place to pick up dinner. The weather was perfect, even nice enough to go for a swim. It reminded Billy of home.

“So what do you want?” Steve asked. “Large, with pepperoni or ham, what?”

Billy shrugged. “You pick Harrington.”

“I swear Billy.” Steve knew he was just calling him by his last name to irritate him, but it still pissed him off. Billy turned and grinned. “Fine, Hargrove, double cheese and onion.” Steve smirked.

“That’s so gross.” Billy shook his head.

“What? Onions are the best, they make the best boyfriend breath. Here you wanna kiss?”

“Get the fuck away from me.” Billy elbowed him off. “All meat. Pepperoni, sausage, and ham. Large.”

“Thank you.” Steve laughed.

It was like that with Billy, never a direct answer, but Steve didn't mind. He could play right into his little games and he was sure Billy was having fun with it too. They picked up dinner and headed to Steve's house. Steve's dad was out of town and his mom was at work, it was perfect. They had the house to themselves. They ate and hit the books, despite Steve's whines. Billy wanted to salvage his grade, because their physics teacher was extremely strict and offered little help on the lessons Billy had missed from the middle of the year. Steve couldn't help him, because he was already failing the class, and in the past every time Billy tried to study with girls they always wound up in bed with him. That was more of Billy's fault, but he hadn't regretted it until now. It was a little after ten, when Steve was ready to call it quits. They had been studying non-stop from the time they got home.

"Oh my gosh, I'm done." Steve closed the book and tossed it to the floor.

Billy looked down at him from Steve's bed. "Seriously? I think you worked on like three problems."

"Did you see those problems? They were like six parts each. I mean why do we have to find all this stuff? It's not like I'm going to use it." Steve rested his head on his knee. Billy smirked and shook his head. "On come on, you know I'm right. Where are we going to use the formula for pressure? It's bullshit I swear, after graduation I'll be free of this shit." Steve stretched out his legs, then raised his arms as he yawned.

"Yeah," A small smile appeared on Billy's face.

"Hey, what are you doing after graduation?"

Billy stared at Steve, then shrugged. "I don't know man." Billy honestly didn't want to talk about graduation right now and quickly changed the subject. "So you think you passed the history final?"

"With Mrs. Cowby? Hell yeah, her class was a cake walk. Why you worried?" Steve finally met Billy's eyes, there was a hint of something there that Steve couldn't quite place.

“No, just asking.” Billy stared at him.

Steve looked at Billy until Billy broke eye contact. Something was bugging him, but Steve couldn't tell what. Billy stretched and yawned and turned over to see Steve was still staring at him. Caught off guard a little red appeared on Billy's face.

“Oh okay I see.” Steve said a smirk.

“What?” Billy said with a little worry.

“I know why you're all quite.” Steve grinned, but Billy had no clue as to what he was talking about. “You're missing this dick.” Steve said with a smug look in his eyes.

Billy coughed, then cracked into laughter. He laughed so hard his face was starting to turn red. “You're serious?” Steve's smile disappeared. “You're actually fucking serious?”

“What, I could do the thing.” Steve folded his arms.

“The thing? You mean fuck me?” Billy sat up and pointed to himself. Steve looked at him like an angry toddler, which only made Billy laugh harder. “You've got to be kidding me.” Billy started coughing. “Harrington, you couldn't fuck your way out of a box, let alone fuck me. Have you ever made a girl climax?”

Now Steve just felt insulted. “Dude, I've fucked girls before and I've had them wet and screaming for more. Just because you've only seen me talk to one girl, doesn't mean I don't know how to fuck.”

“Really? Is that right, so was that King Steve who was out there trying to fuck, what's her name from the party?”

Steve's face turned red. “Alright, get up, ass out. I'm going to show you tonight.” Steve was dead serious, but Billy only laughed more.

“Alright King Steve, I'm ready for a mounting.” Billy got up from the bed and undid his pants and pulled everything down and laid on his stomach on the bed. He turned around and looked at Steve in anticipation. “I'll ready when you are my liege.”

Steve was not expecting Billy to be so blunt about it, but the sight of Billy's firm ass was starting to wake little Steve. "Okay," Steve clapped his hands together. "Let's get to it."

Like a virgin Steve approached Billy's ass with caution, not exactly sure how he should go about it. When they had sex together it was always so passionate and Billy made it seem so easy. Steve swore the guy had magic fingers. Steve walked over to Billy's butt and squeezed it, flashing a grin he was sure looked seductive.

Billy looked over his shoulder. "You have no idea what you're doing?"

Steve backed off. "Yeah you're right, what the fuck was I thinking."

"No way man, you're not worming your way out of this one. You're the one who was talking that big game, so you're the one who's going to follow through."

"Really we don't have to." Steve shied away.

Billy looked at him, then rose his little ass in Steve's face. "Fine, no Billy ass for you, apparently I'm dating a child who can't fuck for shit." Billy teased expecting Steve to back down. He stood up to pull his pants up, but a firm hand pushed him back on his stomach.

"Fine, you want this dick so bad, I'm going to make sure you take it all in." Steve walked over to his nightstand and fumbled around for a bottle of lube. He'd had anal sex before with girls, this shouldn't be any different, besides he wanted to wipe that smug look off Billy's face once and for all.

Steve looked down at Billy's smug face then reached down and unzipped his pants to pull out his own cock. Steve was already getting hard and worked himself up with a little lube.

"Nice Harrington." Billy eyed his dick. "You better not disappoint me."

"Has anyone ever told you that you're way too damn cocky." Steve stared hungrily down at Billy before using his hand to push his partner deeper into the bed.

Steve lubed up his fingers and rubbed the slick lude through Billy's butt cheeks and reached down and grabbed his balls. This earned Steve a surprised yelp from Billy, which only made Steve harder.

"Easy there." Billy warned.

"What? That too hard for you." Steve teased.

"Just hurry up." Billy rolled his eyes.

"You're a real piece of work Hargrove." Steve laughed, then slipped a finger into Billy's ass.

Billy tensed, then hissed when he felt Steve's finger slide in. He clenched his fingers tight, then relaxed to give Steve more access. Steve sensed this and continued slowly, moving the one finger in and out. Billy's entrance was hot and tight, but the expression on Billy's face was driving Steve to want more. Steve slipped a second finger in and a small moan escaped from Billy's lips. Not expecting this kind of reaction, Steve pushed forward, he had no idea Billy was capable of making sounds like this. Steve picked up the pace and slipped a third finger in slowly, Billy's eyes were shut tight and his body was trembling.

"What? You ready to nut already?" Steve pressed deeper, causing Billy the choke.

"Fuck, you." Billy cried out.

"Patience." Steve continued his onslaught.

Steve worked Billy in and out until Billy was practically rutting against his fingers. The noises that escaped from Billy's throat were like music to Steve's ears, sending him into a frenzy.

"Damn it Steve, hurry the fuck up." Billy cried out. His face was red and he was sweating.

"Fine." Steve stared into Billy's eyes with the hungriest look, making Billy tremble and whimper for more.

Steve tapped his dick at the entrance of Billy's ass, then positioned

his head and pushed into the tight ring of flesh. Billy cried out, Steve stopped and waited for Billy to relax before continuing. Billy gripped the sheets and buried his face in the sheets as he relaxed to allow Steve to push farther. Steve got his head through and from there slid his entire shaft into Billy's ass.

"Damn Hargrove, you're so fucking tight." Steve groaned. He reached down and grabbed a handful of Billy's hair and whispered into his ear. "Do you feel me Hargrove?" Steve thrust forward. Billy cried out, then groaned. "Good."

Steve didn't hold back when he finally started fucking Billy from behind. Steve swore he's never been in a tighter ass and pounded Billy like it was an Olympic race. Steve fed off the moans and cries he was getting from his partner, he'd never seen Billy this vulnerable and was starting to like his new position on top. Thighs and ass smacked together as tears streamed from Billy's eyes.

"Fuck Steve." Billy shouted.

"Yeah!" Steve was nearing climax.

"Fuck!" Billy shouted into the bed.

Steve came first with Billy not far behind. A final thrust did Billy in and Steve collapsed on Billy's back.

"Pull out man, pull out." Billy cried, as he gasped for air.

"Oh sorry." Steve slid out as Billy hissed. "Dammit, that felt so good." Steve laid on his back breathing hard.

"Fuck that, that fucking hurt." Billy was completely exhausted and coughed and as he stared at Steve.

"Really? Because I thought you did this before?" Steve looked at him, he understood the pain, anal hurts.

Billy pulled himself further onto the bed, and Steve followed. "I mean I did you and some other dudes in the past."

Steve looked at him in shock. "You've never received?" Billy just

stared at him with a drained look on his face. "Holy shit I popped Billy Hargrove's butt cherry." Steve said with a little too much excitement.

"Shut up, that's not even a thing." Billy rolled his eyes.

"Hell yeah, I was the first to climb the mounds of Billy Hargrove's sweet firm ass." Steve congratulated himself, as Billy just looked at him like he was an idiot.

"You're a fucking moron Steve." Billy reached over to turn off the light, then crawled back over to cuddle with his lover. Steve smiled in the darkness, it felt nice to hear his name on Billy's tongue.

The bell rang for the last time as the seniors left class early. Final exams were over and now everyone was gearing up for graduation. With their caps and gowns tried on and dinner plans made it seemed like everyone had their plans together. Steve on the other hand, tried not to think about it much. He had no real plan for after graduation. His father won't admit it, but he really wanted him to work for his company. Steve of course would rather jump into a fire pit and burn, but honestly what other choice did he have? He started to ask Billy, but Billy would always dodge the subject. Steve figured that his boyfriend was just as unsure as he was, so in these final days of high school Steve decided not to worry about. After all they would have plenty of time to worry about it after June 14th.

Billy waited by his car for Steve to come out, he had gotten into the habit of driving Steve everywhere. He enjoyed the company, not that he would ever admit that to Steve. Instead he just showed up and demanded Steve hop in and it was working for him for the time being.

Steve saw Billy, standing next to his car grinning like a fool. Sometimes Steve wished he could just go over and slobber a big fat kiss on him right in front of everyone, but he didn't need to give the

bullies any more fuel for their insults. The last gay kid they had had to move, things got so bad. Steve ran over and the two did their customary hand shake.

Steve patted him on the shoulder. "Hungry?"

Billy shrugged. "Yeah."

"Yeah? That's all the bottomless pit, Billy Hargrove, has to say?" Steve looked at him with surprise.

"Yeah," Billy avoided eye contact and got into the car. "I'm not hungry today, had a big breakfast."

Steve eyed him. "You okay man?"

"Yes," Billy turned and stared at him, Steve could see that familiar spark and backed off.

"Okay, just checking, no need to blow a fuse." Steve watched the scenery go by. It felt weird knowing that today was officially his last day of high school. Not that he would miss it, but it would be weird waking up next fall and not going to school. "Hey Billy, what are you doing after graduation?"

Billy shrugged. He looked so hot in his sunglasses, with the wind blowing through his hair. His skin was already starting to return to its normal summer glow and Steve couldn't resist how attractive Billy looked with his shirt unbuttoned. Steve was totally enthralled, he wished it could stay like this forever.

"If you take a picture it'll last longer." Billy grinned, as Steve shoved him in the arm. "Hey, watch it, you trying to kill us?" Billy teased.

"As if you'd crash your Camaro." Steve joked.

"Never, but hey it's a crazy world now." Billy stared down the road.

Steve looked at him and smiled. Billy had no idea and Steve hoped it stayed that way.

Night fell, after a long day. Steve and Billy wound up seeing a matinee. Billy was resistant at first when Steve tried to talk him into it, seeing how the movie recommendation came from Dustin. But the movie turned out to be great. After the movie Steve invited Billy to his house for dinner, but his father and mother weren't there. Instead, there was a note that said they had gone over to Steve's cousin's house for dinner and that usually meant they both were going to get flat out drunk and crash there for the night. Steve didn't mind, he loved having the house to himself and since Billy lived in a crowded house, Billy was happy too to have some alone time with Steve too. They left in the evening to grab dinner and watched late night TV before falling asleep in each other's arms.

Steve shivered in the darkness, breath coming from his mouth in thick white puffy clouds. He held onto his nail covered bat, eyes darting all around him. Where were his kids? Where was Hopper? There was nothing but silence. Steve took a trembling step forward in the soft moist Earth. His heart raced, as he inched by in dead silence. A snap of a branch had him frozen like a statue, tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Please God." Steve trembled.

He dared not turn around. He opened one eye, there was nothing but darkness in front of him. His nose ran as he struggled to breath. Then bam and hand on his shoulders sent him into panic as the shrill screech blared into his ears.

Steve awoke screaming and panting, waking Billy immediately. Billy shot up, ready to attack anyone or anything, but when he noticed Steve was a trembling mess Billy quickly wrapped his arms around him.

"Hey man, it's alright." Billy held him tight, rubbing Steve's shoulders. Steve said very little, mostly shook and struggled to breathe. "Calm down, okay. It's okay."

“Oh fuck,” Steve wrapped his arms around Billy. The feel and scent of his boyfriend grounded him. “Oh fuck.” Steve whimpered. His face reddened as he started to realize that Billy saw one of his episodes.

“It’s okay, shh shh.” Billy didn’t let go until he felt Steve was completely relaxed.

“I’m so fucking sorry man.” Steve cried in frustration in his boyfriend’s arms.

Billy pulled Steve off of him. “It’s okay. You hear me?” Billy looked at Steve in the moonlight.

“I just, I just.” Steve wanted so badly to tell Billy what was going on, but the risk was too high. Steve would be lost if anything happened to Billy because he talked.

“It’s okay, let it out.” Billy pulled him close.

Steve started to cry again. “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t sweat it.” Billy held him tight.

It was the day before graduation and Steve was actually starting to get excited. His family was throwing him a big graduation party and he was ready to eat. But he was more excited that Billy and his family would be celebrating with them as well. It didn’t take much convincing on either side and Billy seemed excited too. Steve was super pumped now and even better news his mom got his car fixed.

Steve waited outside of Dustin’s house, listening to Duran Duran. The door opened and out bounced a ball of curly brown hair. Dustin waved to his mom and ran over to Steve’s car.

“How’s it hanging man?” Steve turned and asked as Dustin got in. He started pulling off and waved to Dustin’s mom.

“Can’t complain, Max joined our company last night again and we actually finished in ten hours.”

“Shit man.” Steve didn’t understand that DnD stuff, but he was happy to hear everyone was doing well, after all he cared about his kids. “So you need a ride back?”

“Nah, me and the fellas are hitting the theaters tonight, then I gotta be back home early. For, you know.”

Steve nodded. He’d invited Dustin to his graduation party. Billy gave him shit for it, but Steve didn’t care. “Cool, cool.” Steve pulled onto the main road. After he dropped Dustin off at the arcade he had a date with Billy and he was eager to get to that.

“So ah, why you hanging around Billy so much?” Dustin asked out of the blue.

Steve was caught off guard, but maintained his cool demeanor. He shrugged. “He’s cool now.”

Dustin looked at him. “I heard you and Billy were fucking.”

“Wait what?” Steve’s face turned bright red. “Language and who told you that?”

“Max did, she said you guys are bumping butts.”

“What?” Steve looked at Dustin with real concern. “Bumping what?”

“It’s okay man, but it’s a little weird considering the guy kicked your ass a few months ago, but it you’re cool I’m cool.”

Steve literally felt that he was going to turn into an apple, because of how red his face was. He pulled into the arcade parking lot and stopped at the front door. “You need to stop listening to Max.”

Dustin shrugged. “Seeya tomorrow.” He got out and waved.

“Seeya.” Steve waved back as he watched Dustin walk into the arcade. “Bumping butts?” Steve cringed at the mental image.

Steve pulled off when he saw Lucas and the rest of the gang greet Dustin. He wasn’t aware how obvious his relationship was. If Max figured it out, he wondered who else knew? He was grateful his

father was too busy to care about his life, because if his father ever found out he'd flip. Steve pulled into the Cornfield's drive-way and got out of the car. Steve half expected to see some of Billy's family here for the graduation tomorrow, but the house looked pretty much the same. Steve walked up to the front door and the door opened as soon as he reached for the handle.

"Steve!" Marsha greeted him. "Billy, Steve is here." Marsha opened the door for him.

"Thank you Mrs. Cornfield." Steve walked past her. The den was a complete mess of baked goods and cards. Susan got up and hugged Steve. She gave him a light kiss on the forehead.

"Thank you so much for inviting us to share in your graduation celebration tomorrow." Susan hugged him tightly. The Hargrove's were still in court limbo and all of their extra money went towards getting things for their new house. So they had very little to give Billy the party he deserved.

"It's no big deal Mrs. Hargrove." Steve smiled.

Susan smiled back and returned to helping Marsha with the celebration goodies. Billy appeared from the back and eyed all the crap laying around.

Steve peeked into one of the boxes full of cupcakes. "Your step mom is going all out."

Billy shrugged. Most of this was for Steve's family, sense none of Billy's family could make it to Indiana for the graduation. "All this junk his for your people."

Steve eyed the little cupcakes with Billy's initials on them. "Oh so my name is Billy Hargrove then?" Steve pointed to the box.

Billy looked down and felt a little sentimental, this much care had never gone into anything involving him since his mother died. Susan popped into the den and smiled at Billy so warmly and full of pride, it made Billy feel awkward. He forced a smile, before grabbing Steve. The two were out the door like the place was on fire. Billy walked to

his car.

“Hold on,” Steve stopped. “I wanna drive.”

“Not a chance.” Billy opened the driver seat door.

“Not your car, mine.” Steve nodded back his burgundy BMW.

Billy eye the thing like it was a child covered in chocolate ready to get it's sticky fingers all over stuff. “Yeah no.”

“What? Come on?” Steve held out his hands. “I just got this fixed and I don't think we've broken it in yet.” Steve eyed Billy seductively. Billy thought for a second, then walked over to Steve.

“Alright, I'll give this rust bucket a shot.” Billy grinned.

“Dude you wish you could own a BMW.” Steve walked over to the driver's side and got in.

“Naw, that's a snob's car, I'll stick to my Camaro thank you.” Billy got in and flashed another grin, before Steve waved him off.

“Whatever man, anyways where do you wanna go?” Steve looked at Billy like he was ready to jump his bones.

“Can we go to the spot?”

“The café?”

“No, the spot.” Billy shifted uncomfortably. “The spot where you found me that night when you were out walking.”

Steve thought for a second. Then it came to him. Billy wanted to go to Steve's secret place. “Oh! Sure babe.” Steve winked at Billy, Billy rolled his eyes.

“Shut up and drive.”

Steve took off with Van Halen blasting.

Mouths locked together as wandering hands explored every inch of their bodies. In the back seat of Steve's car the two made out as if they hadn't touched each other in weeks. Steve pulled Billy's tucked shirt from his pants and slid his hands up his chest. Billy followed suit and slipped his hands up Steve's back, pulling his boyfriend closer. Billy deepened the kiss, earning a deep throaty moan from Steve. Then slowly backed off.

"What-what's wrong." Steve said between breaths. He looked into Billy's eyes and saw conflict.

"It's nothing." Billy went to kiss Steve again, but Steve stopped him.

"You can tell me." Steve looked at him.

Billy turned away, a clear sign to Steve that he better back down or he'd be dealing with angry Billy in a moment. "It's nothing I said."

"Okay." Steve backed off. Something was clearly bothering Billy, but right now Steve's dick had other plans. Steve reached over and started to unbutton Billy's shirt. Billy looked at him a little surprised he still wanted to continue. Exposing Billy's chest, Steve slipped into Billy's lap and started grinding on his dick. Billy grunted, apparently when Steve Harrington was horny argument be damned he was going to get his dick. Billy reached around and squeezed Steve's ass hard, earning him another moan. The two continued making out until they had the car rocking to the movements of their bodies.

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

Welp, this is the end.

This was supposed to only be 3k but ㄟ(ˉ▽ˉ) oh well.

Hope you enjoyed it.

Graduation Pt. 2

Chaos reigned over the Cornfield's household as everyone got ready for Billy's graduation. Susan got Max ready as Marsha cooked breakfast for the entire family. Nate Cornfield sat downstairs trying to show a confused Neil how to use the camera. Neil looked anxiously between Nate's thirty-minute demo then to Billy's room.

"Excuse me Nate, how about um, you take the pictures?" Neil offered.

Nate frowned. "Are you sure buddy?"

"Yeah, I mean if you take all the pictures that's more opportunities to get the whole family in."

Nate beamed with excitement. "You're right, I mean you can't be in the pictures if you're taking the pictures. Spot on Neil."

"Yeah, yeah," Neil smiled and excused himself from his bubbly neighbor to check on his son. "Billy? Billy you up?" Neil opened the door. Billy's graduation was at twelve and it was ten o'clock and Billy was still in bed. "For fucks sakes get your ass out of bed." Neil ripped the covers off of him. Startled, Billy raised his hands in defense. "I swear if you fuck this up after all the hard work Susan has been doing." Neil glared, but then backed off. "Just get dressed and take a shower." Neil left the room.

A similar scene played out in the Harrington household. Mrs. Harrington raced around greeting family members and dragging her husband into pictures. Steve's house was packed. Already dressed and ready to go Steve posed with every aunt, uncle, cousin, and grandparent. It was exhausting and he knew he would have to do it all over again when he got his diploma. Steve cringed at all the baby pictures spread around on tables and shelves. He hoped Billy wouldn't give him shit for all the babies pictures of him butterball naked. Steve's mom pulled him over for pictures with their family friends at the same time juggling gifts and cards. This was madness to Steve, but he was sure his mother was used to this craziness as she was a nurse.

The mayor smiled at all the graduates as he delivered the same speech he gave every year. It was a real snooze fest but when they finally got around to calling names that's when things started to pick up. When they called Billy's name Steve clapped along with a few other students that knew him. Billy shook the principal's hand and faked a smile as he walked off the stage. Steve knew Billy didn't care, but Billy was smart. He could have gone to college if he wanted to. A few other names were called next, then Steve rose to go stand in line. He could feel his entire family looking at him. Steve was sure his mom was jumping out of her skin at the sight of her son graduating high school. They called Steve's name and the gymnasium roared. Steve may have had a rough senior year, but the school still remembered its king. Steve turned and waved, hyping everyone up. The principal shook his hand and Steve stopped and flashed his diploma as he threw up his horns and stuck out his tongue. The crowd laughed and cheered and many people patted Steve on the back. It felt good to be on top one last time.

The graduation party at Steve's house was packed to a tee. Even more people showed up, friends of Steve's parents, people Steve hadn't seen since middle school, and a lot others just to name a few. Buried in the madness was Billy and his family. Mrs. Harrington made sure not to forget about Billy and together all the moms decorated for

both boys, even still it was totally a party about Steve.

“Steve!” Steve’s dad waved. “Come over here and meet Mr. Darfer.”

Steve forced a smile when he saw his dad with his work buddies.
“Hi.”

“Hush boy,” Steve’s dad grabbed him and squeezed his shoulder tight, tight enough Steve winced. “This kid right here, I know he’s not a looker, but he’s the next face of Hargrove Associates. All he needs is a little push in the right direction. Right son?” His father looked at him as if he were making a demand, instead of asking a question.

“Yeah sure.” Steve forced a smile as his dad slapped him on the back.

“That’ah boy. Now go see what your mother wants and while you’re over there tell her we’re low on scotch on the mini bar.” Steve’s dad turned and laughed with his coworkers as Steve sighed and tried to compose himself for the dozens of family members eager to see him.

After about fifty million hugs and thank yous Steve managed to slip away to find Billy. The guy was hard to track down in this sea of relatives and family friends. Finally Steve found Billy outside leaning against the side of the house.

“Yo, where you been at?” Steve asked, looking sharp in his new suit.

Billy opened one eye and looked at Steve. His step-mom found Billy a nice dress shirt and slacks, but in comparison to Steve and his family Billy looked like he should be working valet.

Billy shrugged. “Not my party.”

“Bullshit.”

Billy lifted himself off the side of the house. “Really? Because last time I checked I didn’t have a boatload of rich aunts and uncles.” Billy chewed on a toothpick and glanced at Steve. “You look nice by the way.” He avoided eye contact.

“Thanks.” Steve tucked his hands into his pockets. He had been noticing how withdrawn Billy had been lately and was worried

something had come up between the two of them. “Hey, Billy is everything okay?” Steve took a step forward. Billy looked out of place from his usual confident demeanor and before Steve could think, Billy closed the space in between them.

“Move to California with me.” The words spilled from Billy’s lips and before Steve had time to react one of his aunts walked around the house.

“What?” The look on Steve’s face scared Billy. Billy knew this was the wrong time to ask. Billy stepped back, Steve looked at his aunt coming towards him, then back at Billy. Steve was losing him. “Billy.”

“Never mind.” Billy turned and walked away.

“Billy!” Steve shouted as Billy walked past his confused aunt.

The rest of the party was nerve-racking. Billy had suddenly come down with something and he and his family left, leaving Steve alone, trying to process what Billy had asked him.

The following day Steve had more than a few words to say to Billy. After the party guest cleared out Steve made several attempts to get in contact with Billy. Steve called the Cornfield’s place at least five times asking for him. He was grateful they hadn’t cursed him out for calling so much. Steve even drove by the house, but when he didn’t see Billy’s car he got super pissed. Billy was closing him out, running away, just like he always did when things got tough. This time however, Steve wasn’t going to wait around for Billy to come to him.

Billy managed to avoid Steve all day yesterday, but when Billy saw the burgundy tint of Steve’s BMW he started to get nervous. He hadn’t returned a single call or made any attempt to contact Steve and now it was turning around and biting him in the butt. Billy acted

like he didn't see Steve as he walked into the café'. Steve parked and slammed the door, knowing Billy had seen him and now was avoiding him. Steve ran into the café' and scanned the dining area for his boyfriend. He spotted Billy in the back staring out the window. The waitress had just finished asking Billy for his drink orders when Steve walked by, flashing a fake smile at her.

"Hey there Billy." Steve sat in the booth, Billy could already tell by his tone of his voice that he was pissed.

"Hey." Billy said nonchalantly.

"What the fucks been going on?" Steve said under his breath, trying to calm his anger. "Why have you been avoided me and what the fuck was up with the other day?"

Billy stared at Steve with a pissed off look on his face. He didn't want to talk about this right now. "It was nothing."

"Bullshit." Steve said a little too loudly. "What's this about California?"

There was no backing out now. Billy shook his head as his leg bounced up and down. He looked at Steve and clenched his jaw. "I wanted to know if you wanted to move to California with me after graduation."

"After graduation? That was like a day ago, what am I supposed to do? Pack up all my stuff and up and go to California with you?"

"Why the fuck not?" Billy retorted, but then cursed under his breath. "It's not like that."

"Like what? This is so random and sudden." The waitress returned with Billy's drink. Steve smiled, but told her he was fine. She walked away.

"I mean, do you have any other plans?"

Steve just sat and stared at him, like he was looking at a fool. Neither of them had jobs or anything and moving to California all of a sudden was well out of their reach.

“Billy we can’t move to California, how are we going to do that?”

“I have a car.”

“Okay and what about a place to stay, what would we do for money?”

“I have friends out there. My buddy Frank just bought a loft with his girl and another buddy of mine named Spence.”

“So we’ll be shacking up with three people in a tiny apartment?”

Billy leaned back in frustration. “It’s not that small and anyways I thought you would be happy. This place fucking sucks, I hate it here.”

Steve couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Yes Hawkins wasn’t the center of the universe, but it was still his home. “What the hell is wrong with staying here?”

“Are you serious?”

Steve exaggerated a nod. “Billy, it’s not that bad here. With time you could settle in.”

Billy scoffed. “And do what? Get a little job in some shop and live a quiet happy life until I’m seventy.” Billy was joking, but Steve seemed to be okay with the idea. “I was joking, I’m not serious. This place smells and it’s dull.”

“I get it Billy, it’s not your home. But if you give it time, you can make a name for yourself out here.”

“Oh like your family did?” Billy eyed him. Steve nodded. “You know, big fish always think they’re big in small ponds.”

“Billy,”

“Have you even been to the beach?”

“That’s a dumb question.” Steve rolled his eyes.

“Have you?” Billy stared him down.

“I-I’ve been to the lakes, close enough.”

Billy got up and laughed. “You’re a real joke Harrington. I would think you of all people would want to blow this shit hole for a town.”

“Hey, this is my home.”

“And California is mine.” There was so much venom and pain in Billy’s voice. Steve kept forgetting Billy was dragged out here by his family, away from his home and family and friends. “It’s fine, stay here.” Billy dropped some money on the table for the drink and walked out.

Steve didn’t call for him or turn around. He just sat there and stared at the money. Billy was serious and if Steve didn’t get serious he would lose the one person who made him happy.

Normally Steve would be knocking on Billy’s door begging him to be reasonable, but today Steve didn’t have the energy. Two days had passed and there was no sign of Billy. Steve knew Billy wasn’t going to get down on his knees and beg for him to come. Billy wasn’t forward like that, so it was up to Steve to make the decision. Jobless, Steve had nothing to do during the day. His mom told him to take his time, but his father was starting to get antsy and Steve knew if he didn’t take the job with his dad, he was sure he would kick him out.

Steve laid in bed sighing. He slept pretty good last night, which was a rare occurrence, but as soon as he was awake he was reminded of a serious choice he had to make. Should he stay in Hawkins with his family and friends or should he move to California with the boy of his dreams? He did not know.

Two days had gone by and no word from Steve. Usually Steve was the more forward one when it came to matters like these and his absence scared Billy. He knew he should have asked him earlier, but he was too nervous. If he were being honest moving back to California after high school was his plan all along. He knew his buddies were getting a place and as soon as they confirmed it Billy would be out. He didn't count on falling in love however. He was young and could probably find another girl or boy to hook up with, but Steve was special. They had gone through so much together. Steve showed Billy the kind of compassion he had long forgotten about and it tore him apart to even think about leaving Hawkins without him.

He did think about staying, albeit briefly, but he hated this place. From the moment his dad busted into his room back in Cali to tell him the news, he knew he would hate it. Back home there was still a chance for Billy to re-connect with his family and he had even thought about running away a few times to his aunt's, but he never did. Most of all he missed his close knit group of friends. Frank, Ann, and Spence had been Billy's main group since eighth grade; they'd been through hell and back. Billy couldn't bear the thought of having to choose between them and the boy he loved.

It was late in the evening and everyone was out. The Cornfields were at dinner with his father and step-mother and Max was hanging out with her friends. Billy was still on Steve strike, but he needed to talk to someone. He got up from the couch and paced the floor. Any minute now, he hoped Steve would come knocking on his door to tell him that he'd move to Cali with him. Billy stopped and stared at the door, wishing and praying that were the case. Headlights flashed and Billy's heart skipped a beat. He rushed over to the window and pulled down the blinds. It was just their neighbors from across the street backing in. Billy let out the most defeated sigh.

"Damn it Steve." He was ready to break something he was so mad and frustrated.

Needing a release Billy walked into the kitchen and checked the time. It was a little after seven, that meant it was after four in California.

He needed to talk to someone and maybe his friends back home could talk some sense into him. Billy picked up the receiver and dialed the number. He hoped the Cornfields didn't mind that it was long distance, but Billy couldn't sit up inside this house stuck in his head like this. He peeked at the time, he hoped they were home.

"Hello?" A guy's voice picked up.

"Hey man." Billy smiled, it was Frank.

"Billllllyyyy!!!!!" His best friend dragged out Billy's name, making weird sounds over the phone.

Billy rolled his eyes as he held the phone a little bit away from his ear. "You done?"

"Am I done? Fuck you man, BILLLLYYYYY!!!" His friend continued, earning an exasperated laugh from Billy. "So what the fuck is up with you man? We've been waiting for your ass, didn't you graduate June something?"

"Yeah, I've been held up." Billy danced around the subject.

"Held up? You crashed that Camaro didn't you?"

"Hell no." There was silence over the phone. "I didn't."

"So what the fuck is taking you?"

Billy didn't say anything for a long time. He hadn't told his friends yet that he was seeing someone. He actually hadn't talked to them much, because these past couple of months had been crazy.

"I don't know man."

"You don't know."

Billy could visualize Frank's annoyed face over the phone. He heard a muffled noise in the background. Someone was asking who Frank was talking too.

"It's Billy!" Frank shouted and soon Billy heard his name being

shouted over the phone by Frank's girlfriend, Ann. "That's Ann."

"I know." Billy waved even though he knew she couldn't see him.

"Ann! Ann! Billy said hi!" Frank continued to shout. "Say hi shit head." The receiver jiggled.

"Hey Ann!" Billy shouted as a small smile broke out on his face. He could practically see them bouncing around. Frank would still be in his work clothes and he was sure Ann was walking around in one of Frank's shirts bottomless. "Is Spence there?"

"Yeah, we're all here, now what the fuck is taking you Billy?" Frank wanted a real answer now.

Billy picked with the phone cord. "I found someone."

"I don't give a fuck, they're plenty of bitches out here Billy."

"It's not a girl."

"I don't give a fuck, we got dick out here too. What? Some country boy making you want to stay in that shit hole, with your fucking dad to say the least?"

"It's not like that." Billy was starting to get frustrated.

"What? Hey if you want you can bring his ass out here too, I don't care man. We just want you back. It ain't the same without you."

"I know." Billy stayed quiet for a second.

Frank said nothing for a while. "You're going to fucking ditch us, for a fucking piece of ass? You piece of shit." Frank sounded mad for real, then there was a muffled sound with the receiver.

"Frank?" Billy turned and looked around nervously. "Frank?" Billy heard sounds of someone talking but couldn't make out who it was. "Frank you son of a bitch!" Billy clenched the receiver.

"Hey Billy." A new person got on the phone, it was his other best friend Spence.

“Spence? Is that you?” Billy relaxed a bit, he could still hear Frank cursing in the background.

“Cool your shit Frank, shit.” Spence sighed. “Hey man how you been?”

“Alright.”

Spence could tell something was hanging heavy on Billy’s shoulders. Spence was perceptive like that, he could read Billy like a book.

“What’s up?” It got quite on the line, Spence was patient and left it up to Billy at how much he wanted to share.

“I’m in it real deep.” Billy sounded like he was going to crack.

“What’s up? You didn’t get into any trouble did you?”

“No, I got, I got mixed up with this boy.” Billy waited for Spence to say something, but Spence wasn’t the type to talk over him. He let Billy continue. “I fell for this kid Spence, I think I love him and I asked him to move to California with me, but he doesn’t want to and I don’t want to leave Hawkins without him. I’m so fucked up right now, I don’t know what to do.” Billy was near breaking point.

“Don’t do it man.” Spence shocked Billy with his answer. “I know what that kind of love feels like. The kind of love so strong that you would give up everything for. Trust me man in the end you’ll lose more than you gain, it happens all the time. Love is not enough to keep you whole.” Spence could feel Billy cracking over the phone and it hurt him to know his friend was hurting, but Spence had been down this road and he almost didn’t make it back.

“I can’t.” Billy cracked.

“I know man, I know. And I wouldn’t lead you on for selfish reasons, but if the only reason you want to stay in Hawkins is because of a boy, what happens if he moves on one day? I’m not saying me and Frank will cut you cold turkey, I’m not saying that, but you’re friends, your family, your everything is here. Here with us, this Indiana thing was your dad’s crack pot idea, you were just the carry-on. You deserve better than that.”

“Spence I don’t think I can live without him.” Billy’s cheeks were wet from tears, he couldn’t hold them back anymore.

“Then if you wanna stay then stay, but I’m afraid for you Billy that you’ll get stuck somewhere where you can’t grow. I’m afraid you won’t be happy if the only reason you’re there is for him, sometimes love is not enough. You need more of a balance.”

“But without him, I won’t have nothing.” Billy hurt even more saying this to his longtime friend, but Spence had been down this road before and didn’t take it personally.

“I get it man, been there, done that, but there is life after love. Out here in Cali there are tons of people. He gotta understand that Indiana ain’t your scene, never has, never will be and you know I speak the truth.” Spence remembered how pissed Billy was that he had to move the last year of high school. “Hey, give it some thought man and of course you ain’t gotta choose, he’s welcome too, but if you stay make sure the reason you’re staying is for you. Okay man?”

Billy nodded and whimpered a yes. Spence said he had to go, but made Billy promise he would keep him updated. Billy hung up the phone and threw his back against the wall and sled down. He couldn’t stop the tears now. He didn’t want to wake up to a reality where Steve wasn’t there, but he couldn’t stand another minute in Hawkins either. He missed his friends, he missed his home.

Two more days went by, making it almost a week sense Steve had talked to Billy. He didn’t intend on avoiding him for so long. If Steve were being honest, a chance to move away to California sounded amazing. He’d never been, plus he’d be going out there with Billy, but the more he tried to talk himself up the more scared he got. Billy was right, big fish in small ponds really did think they were a big deal, because in a small pond there were no unknowns. Nothing to fear, everyone knew who you were, you knew where everything was, and how to accomplish the goals you wanted. In Hawkins, Indiana you knew your entire life story, right down to the ending, from the moment you were born. Moving away from something so familiar

was scary. What would he do out there? He wasn't going to college, Steve didn't even know what he wanted to do for a living. Then there was the idea of moving away from his mother and Dustin. He couldn't leave Dustin and the gang here in this crazy town. What if the demogorgons returned? Who would protect them? Who would have Nancy and Jonathan's back? Steve didn't want to think about it, but he couldn't stop himself. A small part of him wanted to run away and hide. The things that went down in Hawkins were the makings of nightmares, but the idea of leaving the ones who'd been through it all behind was even worse in Steve's eyes. And if that didn't hurt enough, he couldn't even tell Billy all of this. He was sure Billy thought he was just a big headed coward and would that be a lie? Steve told himself as he sat in the park.

The sunset and Steve rolled off the grass and headed home. His mother would be getting home late and he really wanted to talk to her. Steve opened the door, the smell of a hamburger helper lured him to the kitchen. He thought for a second that his mother had gotten off work early. He was wrong.

"Your mother wanted me to start dinner, she's running late and apparently she's hungry. I don't know why she just doesn't stop and pick something up. I hate this hamburger helper shit." His father complained. "Oh and airhead, vacation's over. Your ass is starting at the second office Monday. So clean up and ask your mother to do something with that hair, you look like a fucking girl with all that stuff."

Steve clenched his jaw. "Dad, I don't want to work there." He blurted out, regretting it immediately.

"What the fuck did you just say?" His father turned and slammed the spatula on the counter. "Listen you little shit, boys your age would be begging for their daddy's to land them a job like this. Grown men grovel on their knees and beg to suck my cock for a job like this and you got the nerve to question all the shit I do for you?" He was now in Steve's face. He pulled Steve close to him by the collar of his shirt. "Don't test me boy, I'll kick your ass out on the curb. So on Monday I better see your ass cleaned up and at that office." He let Steve go. "Is that clear?"

Steve's face was red, but he mumbled a yes before running off to his room. Why did it have to be like this? Why couldn't Billy just stay?

Steve dozed off and was awoken by a light knock on his door. He pretended to be sleep, but a mother always knows. His mom walked over to his bed and sat down, placing a gentle hand on his back.

"Hey sugar pea, you awake?" Steve's mom rubbed his back. Steve nodded. "You hungry? Your father burned dinner so I went out picked up some Kentucky Fried Chicken."

"Nah, I'm good mom." Steve faced away from her.

She ruffled his soft hair. "Your father wants you to cut this, but I like it just the way it is."

Steve turned around and faced her. She was smiling down at him like she always did, with eyes filled with some much tenderness. "Mom?"

"Yes sugar pea."

"If I moved away would you get mad at me?"

"Steve of course not, you have to do what you have to do. You know I moved down here to Hawkins for your father."

"Was it worth it?"

She kind of laughed, then smiled. "Yeah, I know he's an asshole, but he's my asshole and honestly I couldn't imagine life without him."

Steve smiled softly and wrapped his arms around his mom. "Thanks mom."

She kissed him on the head. "Anytime my little sugar pea."

The very next day Steve found himself standing at the Cornfield's door. He had been standing there for about twenty minutes trying to work up the nerve to knock, but even now he had cold feet. He raised

his hand to the doorbell to knock when the door swung open. It was Max.

“Hey-hey Max.” Steve stuttered.

She stared at him and turned to the back. “Billy! Steve is here!”

“Wait, wait, wait.” Steve tried to hush her.

“Hurry up and chat, we gotta go.” Max walked past him towards Billy’s car.

Steve watched her leave, his car was only a few feet away. If he ran now he could make it to his car without even seeing Billy. Steve thought about it seriously too, but froze when he felt the presence of a warm body. He slowly looked up and saw two cold blue eyes staring down at him.

“Billy.” Steve acted surprised.

“Move.” Billy commanded but didn’t walk any further.

“Billy, I ah.” Steve danced around the subject. The horn beeped, which startled Steve, but Billy still stared at him unfazed. “Shit.” Steve said under his breath. “When you’re finished meet me at the spot.” Steve said with hooded eyes and rushed over to his car.

Billy watched him leave with an uneasy look on his face. He wanted to know right now what Steve had to say, but at the same time he didn’t want to know anything at all. Over the past few days he had worked up the nerve to pack his things and leave. Saturday was the day and he was planning to leave without a word. It was the easiest way for him to cut ties, because he hated goodbyes, but now Steve was suddenly at his door. And from the look of his body language Steve’s answer could go either way. Billy clenched his fist, the anger and anxiousness was building in his gut and it made him feel sick. The horn beeped again, startling Billy this time.

“Hold your fucking horses.” He shouted as he locked the front door and walked over to the car. “I swear Max.” He hissed.

“Hey, if I had my own ride I wouldn’t be fucking asking you.” She

retorted.

Billy glared at her, but she just through back an equally matching bitch face. He hated her sometimes, most of the times. He would be happy to leave her and all this mess behind.

Billy thought briefly about taking off tonight and skipping the whole meeting with Steve altogether. This was too much work, maybe Frank was right, maybe he should just try and find someone in Cali. But here he was pulling down the familiar path to spot where it all started. He dreaded each foot he took, as he clenched the steering tight hoping and not hoping Steve was there. If Steve was there he would have to get an answer, if Steve wasn't he could run away. It was dusk, but the brush was thick and his headlights could barely be seen on the trunks of the trees and on the bushes. Billy saw Steve's BMW, then saw Steve standing next to his car leaning on it, facing away from him. Billy pulled in and parked and Steve looked at him. Billy killed the engine and got out.

"I'm here." Billy walked over to Steve.

"Hey." Steve leaned off his car and met Billy at the end of his car. Steve wasn't sure he was ready, but it was now or never he guessed. "Billy, I um, I um."

"What?" Billy said in a testy mood.

"Okay, here it is." Steve swallowed hard. "Billy I'm scared, I'm really fucking scared. And-and I want to move to California with you." Steve managed to get out over the sound of his racing heart. Steve didn't make eye contact with Billy and for a long while no one said anything. When Steve couldn't take the silence anymore he looked up and met Billy's eyes. Billy was looking at him with cloudy blue eyes, like a weight had been lifted off him. Steve smiled. "So what do you say? Is the offer still on the table?"

Billy shook his head to knock himself out of his stupor. He was honestly not expected this. "Um yeah," Billy wiped his watering eyes

and ran his fingers through his hair. “What the fuck took you so long?”

“I had to think about it. I mean this was a big decision, plus my dad was hounding me. You know I’m a pretty big fish here and leaving, leaving my pond Billy it’s like.”

“Hard?” Billy knew all too well as he smirked.

Steve laughed. “Yeah.”

Billy laughed too. “Well big fish, you ready to come to my part of town. I swear it’ll be the best time of your life.”

“It better.” Steve joked back. Billy laughed, then pushed Steve against Steve’s car and stole the sweetest kiss he’d ever had. It felt so good to be in the loving arms of his man again, there was no better feeling.

In theory telling his parents the news would be a walk in the park, but Steve knew it was all going to blow up in his face. Billy wanted to leave Wednesday, it was Sunday now and even with a talk from Billy, Steve felt like he wasn’t ready. Packing was even worse. On Saturday Billy came over to help him pack stuff and that almost turned into a fight, because how could you pack up your entire life in one afternoon. To be fair, Billy didn’t have much, as most of his stuff burned up in the fire. So it was easy for him to pack. Steve, on the other hand, had never lived outside Hawkins.

Steve sat at the dinner table and poked at his meatloaf. He had no idea how he would break the news to his parents.

“Everything alright sugar pea?” His mother asked.

“Yeah mom, everything is okay.” Steve responded and she smiled.

His father looked at him with his mouth half full of food. “You got a big day tomorrow and I still see that you look like a fucking bum.”

“Matthew.” His mother hissed.

“What?” Mr. Harrington shrugged.

“We talked about this, we both agreed Steve needed a little more time. Let the boy enjoy his summer.”

“Summer? What the fuck is he supposed to do for money? Leech off us?”

“Excuse me,” His mother hissed. “I have my own money thank you very much and I can support him just fine.”

Steve’s dad glared at her. “All this woman talk, Margret, you’re going to baby the boy. He’s already a pussy.”

“Matthew you son of a bitch, if you don’t shut your mouth.”

“Hey, am I wrong?” Steve’s dad looked down at him.

“I swear I’ve had it up to here.” Margret slammed her hands on the table and stood up.

“What the fuck are you going to do about it?” Steve’s dad got up too, his parents looked like they were about to break out into a fight.

Steve flinched as the two exchanged threats. Fed up, Steve threw down his fork and stood up. “I’m moving to California on Wednesday, gosh you’re so fucking annoying.” Steve stared down his dad.

“What the fuck did you say to me?” Steve’s dad looked like he was about to jump over the table, but his mother had a firm grip on his shirt.

“Matthew.” The way she said his name sounded like a cuss. His mother could be scary like that, because she was tough. Seeing death and saving lives day in and day out made her as tough as nails. Matthew backed off, he knew better than to cross her with that level of fury in her eyes. “Steve.” She followed after to him. She opened up his door and stood in the frame. Steve was sitting on his bed facing the window. “Steve why didn’t you tell us?” His father appeared behind her, but didn’t say anything.

Steve turned around and looked at them both, his mother looked hurt. "I'm sorry mom, Billy asked me after graduation."

His father pushed past his mother. "Billy?" He said with anger.

Margret rolled her eyes and held his father back. "Don't you have some paperwork to do? Can't you see our son doesn't want to run your little business?" Matthew looked visibly mad, but Margret could care less. Instead he stormed out. "Don't mind him." She crossed the room and sat on his bed. "Baby, is this what you want?" Steve nodded, with a conflicted look in his eyes. His mother smiled and reached for his chin and planted a kiss on his forehead. "Okay sugar pea, but you have to promise mommy you'll call once a week and always come home from the holidays; money for travel is on me. Okay?"

Steve smiled. "Of course mom." He wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tight.

The scene was much the same at Billy's house when he broke the news to his parents. His father didn't like the idea of Billy moving back to California with Steve, but Susan said it was good for him. When they left California they thought it would have good for the family, but now they were starting to see how selfish it was. Both Billy and Max had left their friends behind and family. The least they could do is give them the option to go back.

Neil took a sip of his beer as he sat in the den. The Cornfields were out tonight visiting friends. They were a social couple and kept busy. Susan was in the den with him, knitting, when Billy walked in from his room.

"So you're taking that Harrington boy with you?" Neil asked coldly. Billy slowed to a stop as Susan looked up.

"Yeah."

"To those hooligans house?" Neil never took his eyes off the TV, he

was clearly still mad.

“Neil,” Susan tried to draw his attention away.

Billy rolled his eyes. “They’re not hooligans.”

Susan put down her knitting. “Honey let it go, he’s going to be fine. He’s moving in with Spence and Frank and I think his girlfriend too.” Susan looked up at Billy who was on his way back to his room. “It was Frank’s girlfriend too, right Billy?” Billy nodded on his way back to his room. “See.”

“All this work I did to keep this family together.” Neil took another sip of his beer.

“And you’re doing a good job, but sometimes you need to back off and let the kids grow. Billy’s smart and resourceful, he is a Hargrove after all.” She smiled.

“I know, I’m just worried about him.” Neil expression softened, he frowned, then felt Susan’s hand on his arm.

“I know.” She smiled at him and he managed to return her smile.

It was Tuesday, the day before Steve was supposed to leave for California with Billy, and he still hadn’t found a good way to break the news to Dustin. They had been through so much over the past year and a half, leaving like this almost felt like a betrayal. Dustin knew how Steve felt about Billy and he didn’t seem to care, but dropping news like this out of the blue. Steve didn’t know how his friend would react.

Dustin’s mom had evening plans and asked Steve if he could pick him up from the movies. Steve agreed, seeing this as the only opportunity to tell his friend the news. He waited outside in his car for Dustin and Lucas to come out hoping this night would run as smoothly as possible.

Crowds let out and Steve saw Dustin and Lucas walking towards his

car. Dustin spotted Steve in the driver's seat and waved. Steve forced a smile and returned the wave.

Dustin ran to the passenger seat. "Shotgun!"

Lucas rolled his eyes and hopped in the back behind Steve.

"How was the movie?" Steve asked.

Dustin was the first to respond, as always as the chatty one. "It was freaking amazing."

"Oh yeah?" Steve looked at Lucas' excited face in the rearview mirror. "What did yawl go see again?"

"Back to the Future." Lucas chimed in.

"Nice." Steve nodded. "Solid choice."

"You bet your ass it was." Dustin smiled and went on to talk about the movie the entire ride to Lucas' house.

Steve dropped Lucas off and drove towards his house. When they passed Dustin's street, that's when Dustin started to get worried.

"Um Steve, you passed my street." Dustin looked back.

"We're not going to your house." Steve said all serious. "We're going to mines."

"Uh okay." Dustin said warily. "Um Steve is everything okay?"

Steve didn't say anything for a while. "I just gotta show you something." Steve didn't make eye contact.

"Oh okay bubby." Dustin laughed nervously.

Steve pulled into his driveway and didn't say a word. He got out and Dustin followed. His father was home, but Steve didn't care. Steve stopped at the front door and stared at Dustin.

"Dustin, I have some news." Steve squeezed the handle tight and took a deep breath. "Dustin, I'm."

“You’re moving.” Dustin said flatly.

Steve’s eyes looked like they were going to pop out of his head. “Wait, how do you know?” Steve stared at Dustin, then the answer came to him. Max. “Shit.” Steve opened the door.

“I won the bet at least, she said you were going to ditch me and not say a word.”

“What?” Steve looked shocked. “Now that’s cold.” Steve led Dustin to his room. He was grateful his dad was upstairs doing something else.

“I’m glad I won too.” Dustin stared up at Steve, with a sad smile.

“Hey,” Steve walked over to Dustin and patted him on the back. “It doesn’t matter how far I go, I’ll always be here for you.”

Dustin looked down at his shoes. “I know, but why do you have to leave?”

Steve sighed and led Dustin into his room. “It’s, it’s completed.”

“No it’s not, you like Billy more than us, say it.” Dustin frowned.

“It’s not,” Steve pinched the bridge of his nose. “Dustin, you remember how you felt about Max?”

“Max is with Lucas.”

“Yes I know, but do you remember how you felt about her those months ago?”

Dustin thought for a second, then slowly nodded as he recalled those feelings that he had for her.

“Well it’s like that for me with Billy.” Steve reddened a little.

Dustin stared at Steve for a while, then nodded. “I get you bro, you gotta chase after who you love.” Dustin tried to look happy, but it was easy to tell he was unhappy about Steve leaving. “I just, what if the, you know, returns?”

Steve stepped forward. "Then you call me and I'll be back faster than you can hang up the receiver." Dustin looked at him like he wanted to believe him. "Here," Steve walked over to his closet and pulled out something. He showed it to Dustin, it was his nail embedded bat. "I want you to have this."

"Wo." Dustin took the bat from Steve.

"You're the big king in town now, I'm leaving this job to you Dustin."

Dustin looked up in awe. "Are-are you sure?"

Steve nodded. "I know you can do it, but believe me when I say this, if those ugly sons of bitches ever return to Hawkins, the king will be back to kick their asses, in the meantime Hawkins needs a new king." Steve stared at Dustin, who had a mixture of amazement and fear on his face. "You think you can handle it?"

Dustin clenched the bat then swung it over his shoulder. "You can count on me." Dustin said proudly.

"Wo wo kid, okay." Steve laughed after he recovered from dodging Dustin's swing. "Good. I'm leaving this up to you and I know you won't let me down. Take care of the others while I'm gone. Okay?" Dustin nodded as Steve pulled him into a tight hug. "Okay." Steve struggled not to cry as he felt the whimpers of his dear friend in his arms. Goodbyes sucked, but goodbyes are not forever.

Thanks to Steve's mom, Steve had everything he needed packed. She sent the boys off with food, clothes, and money and made them promise to call every step of the way. Billy drove down the interstate like a wild horse cut loose, with the windows down, hair blowing in the wind. Steve sat next to him looking at his boyfriend sing AC/DC like it was going out of style. They chased the sun on the horizon like it was leading them home.

Billy looked over at Steve and smiled.

Steve grinned. "If you take a picture it'll last longer." He echoed a comment Billy had made some time ago.

Billy smiled more, then laughed. "You're a real piece of work Harrington." He turned and looked at Steve.

Steve nudged Billy. "It's Steve pea brain." He laughed.

"I know," Billy smiled and looked ahead and the two rode off down I-70 together and never looked back.